★ COPA LIBERTADORES REVIEW

World Soccer®

GLOBAL FOOTBALL SINCE 1960

March 2021

6

Of the best January transfers

▸ **EUROPA LEAGUE**
Players to watch

▸ **CLUB WORLD CUP**
Review and squads

ALSO INSIDE

SON HEUNG-MIN
Player biography

EYEWITNESS
South Sudan • Mesut Ozil • Qatar •

KNOCKOUT STAGE PREVIEW

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

CRUNCH TIME

PLUS

AFRICAN CL ▸ ROONEY ▸ ARGENTINA ▸ J.LEAGUE ▸ LAMPARD

SOCCER BOOKS
EST. 1982

FOOTBALL BOOK SPECIALISTS • www.soccer-books.co.uk

YEARBOOK OF EUROPEAN FOOTBALL 2020-2021

Our Yearbook of European Football, published as a replacement for the defunct *European Football Yearbook* covers domestic and international football during the 2019/2020 season. Includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches played by all 55 UEFA member countries with basic info (name, date of birth and club) for those who played in these games. For domestic football it contains an historical list of champions and top scorers for each country, results of top division games and a final league table for the past season, information about each National Cup Final, player listings for top division clubs (with appearances and substitute appearances) plus some other statistics. Also includes full statistics for the Champions League and Europa League 2019/2020.

Softback Price £39.95 ***Postage Rate 'G'***

THE FOOTBALL YEARBOOK 2020-2021

Formerly the *Rothmans Football Yearbook* and *Sky Sports Football Yearbook*, the 51st edition of this bestselling title contains over 1,000 pages packed with statistical information about British football during the 2019/2020 season.

Softback Price £25.00 • Hardback Price £45.00

Postage Rate of each edition is 'D'

NON-LEAGUE CLUB DIRECTORY 2020/21

The 43rd edition of this English Non-League football 'bible' is endorsed by the Football Association and is packed with information about more than 600 clubs in steps 1 to 6 of the English non-league football pyramid.

Softback Price £24.99 ***Postage Rate 'D'***

THE COMPLETE BELGIUM FC 1904-2020

A complete match-by-match statistical record of every game played by the Belgian national team from their very first match in 1904 through to the end of 2020. Includes full line-ups for both teams, scores, scorers, attendance and venue.

Softback Price £19.50 ***Postage Rate 'B'***

THE COMPLETE ITALY FC 1898-2020

A complete match-by-match statistical record of every game played by the Italian national team from their first match in 1898 to the end of 2020. Includes full line-ups for both teams, scores, scorers, attendance and venue.

Softback Price £19.50 ***Postage Rate 'B'***

THE COMPLETE NETHERLANDS FC 1905-2020

A complete match-by-match statistical record of every game played by the Dutch national team from their first match in 1905 to the end of 2020. Includes full line-ups for both teams, scores, scorers, attendance and venue.

Softback Price £19.50 ***Postage Rate 'C'***

THE SOUTH AMERICAN FOOTBALL YEARBOOK 2020-2021

A 555-page statistical yearbook about South American football during the 2019-2020 season. Includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches, a historical list of domestic champions for each country, results of every League game, a final League table for the past season, National Cup Final info and player listings for the top division. Includes full statistics for the Copa Libertadores 2019 and Copa Sudamericana 2019.

Softback Price £36.50 ***Postage Rate 'D'***

THE NORTH & CENTRAL AMERICAN FOOTBALL YEARBOOK 2020-2021

A 499-page statistical yearbook about football in North & Central America plus the Caribbean during the 2019-2020 season. Includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches and a historical list of domestic champions in each country, a final League table for the past season, National Cup Final information and top division player listings.

Softback Price £36.50 ***Postage Rate 'D'***

THE ASIAN FOOTBALL YEARBOOK 2020-2021

A 605-page yearbook of domestic and international football in Asia during the 2019-2020 season. Includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches played by the 47 Asian countries plus basic information for those who played. For domestic football, this book contains a historical list of champions for each country, a final League table for the past season and information about each National Cup Final. Further details are included about the leading clubs in some of the larger countries as are full line-ups and statistics for the AFC Champions League 2019 and AFC Cup 2019.

Softback Price £36.50 ***Postage Rate 'D'***

FOREIGN LANGUAGE SEASON PREVIEW MAGAZINES

KICKER SONDERHEFT BUNDESLIGA 2020/2021 (GERMANY SEASON PREVIEW)

A German-language, magazine-style preview of the 2020/21 season in the German Bundesliga. Well-illustrated in full-colour with full-page team photos for the top two divisions plus smaller team photos for clubs in the 3.Liga. Includes player info and photos for the top division clubs.

Softback Price £14.99 ***Postage Rate 'C'***

GUERIN SPORTIVO CALCIO ITALY 2020-2021 (ITALY SEASON PREVIEW)

An Italian-language magazine preview of the 2020/2021 season in Serie A and Serie B. Contains player statistics and individual player photos for Serie A teams plus less detailed Serie B info.

Softback Price £14.99 ***Postage Rate 'B'***

FOOT MAGAZINE SPECIAL COMPETITION 2020-2021 (BELGIUM SEASON PREVIEW)

A French-language, magazine-style preview of the 2020-2021 season in the Belgian League. Well-illustrated with team photos covering a two-page spread plus player photos and information.

Softback Price £12.99 ***Postage Rate 'B'***

CADERNOS DE A BOLA FUTEBOL 2020/2021 (PORTUGAL SEASON PREVIEW)

A Portuguese-language, magazine-style preview of the 2020/2021 season in the Portuguese League. Well-illustrated in full-colour with team photographs plus player photos and statistics.

Softback Price £13.99 ***Postage Rate 'B'***

VOETBAL INTERNATIONAL SEIZOENGIDS 2020-2021 (NETHERLANDS SEASON PREVIEW)

A Dutch-language, magazine preview of the 2020/21 season in the Dutch League. Well-illustrated in full-colour with player photos & stats for the top division and player info for 2nd division clubs

Softback Price £17.99 ***Postage Rate 'C'***

BUNDESLIGA JOURNAL 2020 (AUSTRIA SEASON PREVIEW)

A German-language, well-illustrated, full-colour magazine-style preview of the 2020/2021 season in the top division of Austrian football. Includes team photographs and player information.

Softback Price £12.99 ***Postage Rate 'B'***

10% DISCOUNT ON ORDERS OVER £60

ORDERING INFORMATION

SURFACE DELIVERY – UK 2-5 days • Europe 1-3 weeks

AIRMAIL – Europe 3-14 days • Rest of World 2-4 weeks (COVID delays possible)

PAYMENT We accept: Major Credit Cards £ Sterling Cheques, Money Orders, Postal Orders, Debit Cards or Cash • Euro (€) Banknotes • Paypal to – order@soccer-books.co.uk

Postage Rate	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
UK Postage	£1.95	£2.50	£3.50	£4.50	£6.50	£6.50	£7.00
Europe Surface	£4.00	£6.00	£8.00	£12.50	£16.00	£16.00	£16.00
Europe Airmail	£4.50	£6.50	£8.50	£13.50	£17.00	£17.00	£17.00
Rest of World Air	£6.00	£8.00	£12.00	£14.50	£17.00	£24.00	£27.50
USA Airmail	£8.00	£11.00	£15.00	£17.50	£21.00	£25.00	£28.50
Maximum UK Postage £8.00 per order							

ORDER FORM

TITLES	PRICE £	PRICE p	POST £	POST p

FROM:

COST		
ORDERS OVER £60 LESS 10%		
SUBTOTAL		
+POST		
TOTAL		

Send to:
SOCCER BOOKS LTD. (WORLD SOCCER),
72 ST. PETERS AVENUE,
CLEETHORPES,
DN35 8HU. ENGLAND
Tel: (01472) 696226
Or e-mail:
info@soccer-books.co.uk

Please make cheques payable to Soccer Books Limited

I enclose a cheque, cash or British Postal Order for the amount shown

I wish to pay by Credit/Debit Card ☐ Expiry date .....

Security code – last 3 digits on signature strip (or 4 digits printed on front of Amex cards)

CARD NUMBER:

10% DISCOUNT **On orders over £60** (excluding postage)

www.soccer-books.co.uk

WorldSoccer
Global football intelligence since 1960

Contents

FEATURES

28 Mesut Ozil
EyeWitness reaction from Turkey to his move to Fenerbahce

52 Champions League
Knockout stage preview and talking points

44 Player biography
Son Heung-min

THE WORLD THIS MONTH
People in the news...on and off the pitch

4 **In pictures**
13 **Jim Holden** Solskjaer scepticism
14 **Keir Radnedge** Jules Rimet 100 years on
16 **Jonathan Wilson** Bielsa ball
18 **Ins & Outs** People on the move
20 **Obituaries**

HEADLINERS
22 **Wayne Rooney**
23 **Guus Hiddink**
24 **Chelsea**
25 **Phil Neville**
26 **Ravel Morrison**
27 **Ligue 1**

EYEWITNESS
32 **Qatar**
36 **Nigeria**
40 **South Sudan**

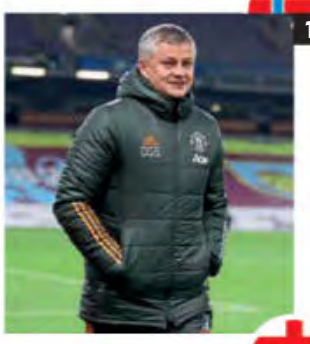
EUROPA LEAGUE
60 **Ones to watch**

6 OF THE BEST
64 **January transfers**

FACE TO FACE
66 **Dejan Stankovic**
70 **Taiwo Awoniyi**

SPECIAL REPORT
74 **Post-pandemic landscape**

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL
78 **Phil Neville's England tenure**



13

22

60

70

Follow World Soccer online
FOOTBALL 24-7

Follow @worldsoccermag Like World Soccer Magazine

SAVE MONEY ON WorldSoccer
Exclusive subscription offer
See page 8

World Service
Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

84
82 Club World Cup Review
84 Copas Libertadores & Sudamericana Reviews
88 Argentina Copa Maradona
90 Africa CAF Champions League
92 Japan J.League preview

PLUS 86 The month in numbers 87 Brunei 94 ESM XI 95 Club World Cup squads 96 Results, tables, fixtures 98 Stadiums

In Pictures

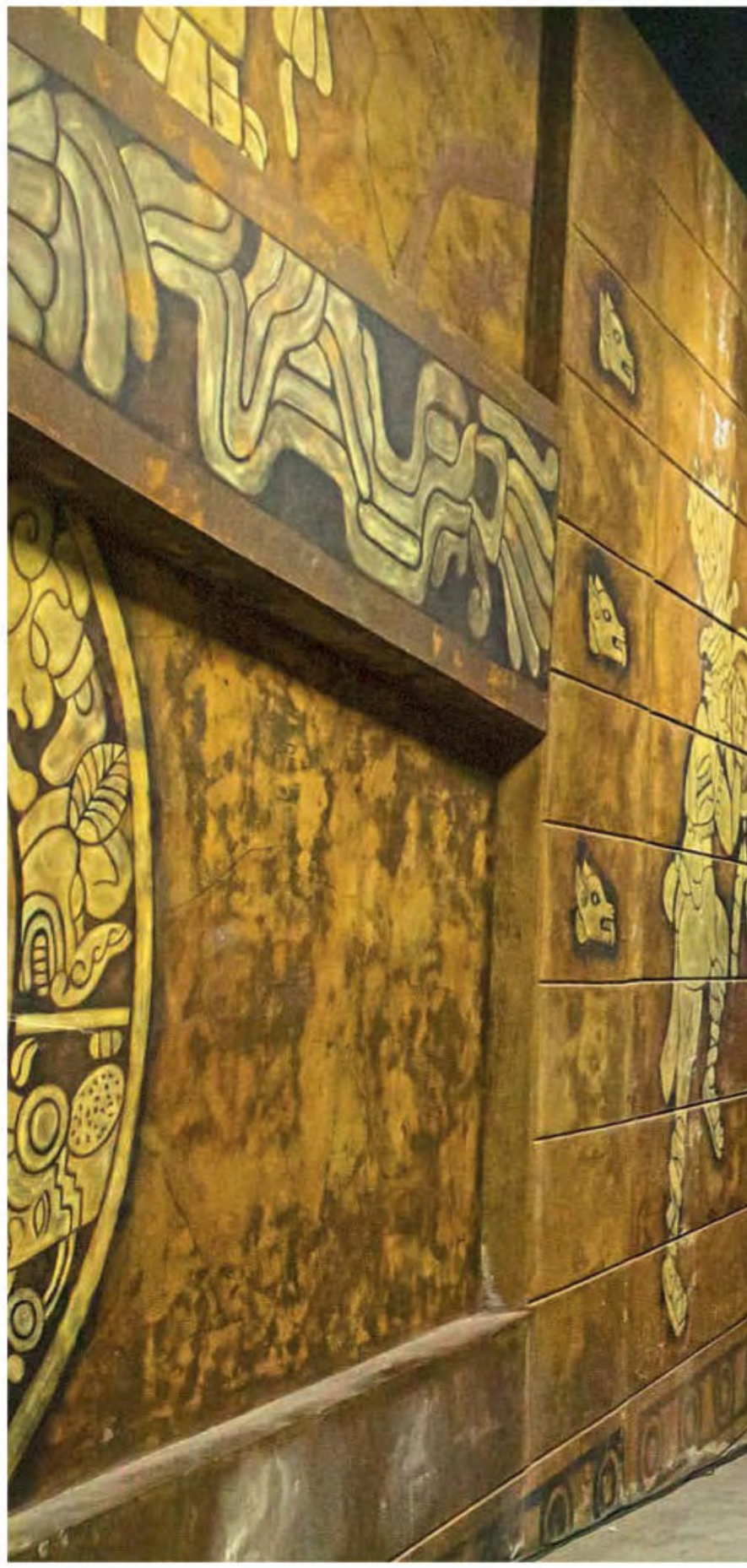
The global game caught on camera

Brazil...Palmeiras forward Rony celebrates with the Copa Libertadores trophy after his side defeat Santos 1-0 in the final at the Maracana

EBOL LIBERTADORES
EBOL LIBERTADORES
PALMEIRAS

Italy...Romelu Lukaku and Zlatan Ibrahimovic go head-to-head during the Milan derby. Both players scored, and Ibra was sent off, in a 2-1 win for Internazionale

Spain...Lionel Messi walks off the pitch after being shown the first red card of his Barcelona career in the Spanish Super Cup defeat to Athletic Bilbao



Brazil...Palmeiras players celebrate winning the Copa Libertadores by cutting down the goal net at the Maracana

Mexico...the players of Pumas and Tijuana line up inside the Caliente Stadium ahead of the first match of the Liga MX Clausura campaign

England...Alisson holds his head after conceding a penalty against Burnley. The Clarets won 1-0 to end Liverpool's 68-game unbeaten run at Anfield in the Premier League

Qatar...Tigres supporters arrive at the Education City Stadium in Al Rayyan for FIFA's Club World Cup

STAY INFORMED STAY INSPIRED.

3 ISSUES FOR £5

Try a subscription with our special sale offer

Don't miss this special subscription offer

Pay just **£5** for your first three issues of *World Soccer*

Continue to **save 35%** after your trial – save on newsagent prices!

Never miss an issue with FREE UK delivery direct to your door

Save 72%

GET WORLD SOCCER DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR!

PAY £5 FOR YOUR FIRST 3 ISSUES*

Subscribe online now shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSC221 or call 01959 543 747 quote code WSC221

Calls charged at your standard network rate. Lines are open 8am-5.30pm Monday to Friday.

*Terms and conditions: Offer available for UK Direct Debit customers only. You will pay £5 for your first 3 issues. Your subscription will then continue every 6 months at the rate of £24.99 – still saving 35%. For overseas rates please visit shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSC. Offer closes March 31, 2021. Full UK subscription rate for 13 issues is £77.87, USA & EU £91, RoW £98. Here at Kelsey Publishing we take your privacy seriously and will only use your personal information to administer your account and to provide the products and services you have requested from us. We will only contact you about our special offers via the preferences you have indicated, and you can update these at any time by emailing us at cs@kelsey.co.uk or by calling us on 01959 543 747.

FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

In recent years the Champions League knockout rounds have delivered some epic drama worthy of its own Netflix series. From Bayern Munich's 8-2 thrashing of Barcelona in Lisbon last year, to Liverpool's extraordinary semi-final comeback against the same opponents in 2019, plus the unexpected heroics of Ajax, Atalanta and RB Leipzig, this stage of the competition has witnessed some of football's most defining and iconic moments. As crunch time begins again, we've taken a look at all the teams involved in the last 16 (page 52), plus a glance at the players to watch in the Europa League (page 60).

If the UEFA competitions can match the dying minutes of the Copa Libertadores final, then we'll have plenty to look forward to. Tim Vickery has a full report from the Maracana on page 84. The Club World Cup has been and gone too, with Samindra Kunti covering the tournament in Qatar (page 82), and he's not the only person with an eye on the Middle East country: John Duerden has given us an update on the 2022 World Cup preparations (page 32).

> "If the UEFA competitions can match the dying minutes of the Copa Libertadores final, then we'll have plenty to look forward to"

Finally, we've had the chance to assess the January transfer window. There's a *World Soccer* debut for Emre Sarigul as he takes a look at Mesut Ozil's arrival at Fenerbahce (page 28), plus six of the best signings on page 64 and the usual round-up of the most eye-catching comings and goings on page 18.

Jamie Evans, Assistant Editor

UEFA

More measures to ward off Super League plans

Plans to prevent the introduction of a new European Super League have gathered pace in recent weeks.

In January, FIFA – with support from all six continental confederations, including UEFA – issued a statement declaring: "Any club or player involved in such a competition would as a consequence not be allowed to participate in any competition organised by FIFA or their respective confederation."

Weeks later, the Football Supporters Europe, a group representing fans, also added their objections with a statement signed by "a wide cross section of European fans, including national fans' organisations, fans of the top 200 ranked UEFA clubs, fans of clubs that reportedly back a breakaway league, and fans of previous winners of European competitions."

"We are all united in our opposition to the creation of a European Super League – an unpopular, illegitimate, and dangerous scheme in the eyes of the overwhelming majority of fans," the statement read.

Meanwhile, the Premier League put together a raft of proposals for UEFA to re-shape the Champions League, including replacing the

"The members know very well who Laporta is and how he managed Barca: he left a club with a debt of €450m… if he is elected, the club will be in real danger"

Toni Freixa takes a swipe at rival presidential candidate Joan Laporta

UEFA…protecting the Champions League

current group stage with a format in which the 32 clubs would play ten opponents and qualification would be decided in one league table.

SPAIN

Barcelona in crisis

The scale of Barcelona's crisis was thrown into fresh light by the revelation in *Marca* that the club's debts totalled over €1 billion with significant transfer fees still owed for several players, including Philippe Coutinho (€40m), Frenkie de Jong (€48m), and Miralem Pjanic (€52m).

The club's perilous finances are likely to be the top priority for the club's next president, with the postponed election due to take place on March 7. *World Soccer* will feature coverage of the results in a future issue.

Troubled times… Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman

HEROES & VILLAINS

Match-winner…Breno Lopes

BRENO LOPES

In November he was still playing for Brazil's Serie B club Juventude, and as recently as 2019 he was in the third tier. He hardly pulled up any trees there either, with four goals in 17 matches, yet fast forward to January 2021 – via loan spells at Figueirense and Athletico Paranaense – and the 25-year-old is at the pinnacle of South American club football, coming off the bench to score Palmeiras' stoppage-time winner in the Copa Libertadores final.

ASIER VILLALIBRE

The Athletic Bilbao striker came to his side's rescue in the 90th minute of their Spanish Super Cup final against Barcelona, but that's only half the reason he's a hero. After Inaki Williams had given the Basques the trophy with a goal in extra-time, Villalibre lead the celebrations by playing his trumpet.

NUNO ESPIRITO SANTO

The Wolverhampton Wanderers manager donated £250,000 to the Wolves Foundation project, Feed Our Pack, which aims to reduce the effects of food poverty and support local people affected by the pandemic. "Wolves fans and the people of Wolverhampton have been fantastic to me since I arrived here almost four years ago, and I wanted to give something back and help the people who are struggling during the pandemic," the Portuguese coach said.

JACK GREALISH

And Nuno was not the only person to give back to his community in the West Midlands recently. Aston Villa skipper Grealish donated £2,000 towards the funeral costs of an 18-year-old fan of the club, who was recently killed in a car accident. "R.I.P. Mia. Sending my deepest condolences to your family and friends," he said in an Instagram post.

RACIST FANS

Police made an arrest after racist abuse was sent to West Brom's Romaine Sawyers, while Chelsea and Manchester United have spoken out against abuse of their players. Meanwhile, an Irish teenager avoided a criminal conviction for racially abusing Ian Wright. "My forgiveness of this young man was for my own need…I wasn't expecting my forgiveness to be an invitation to lighten a sentence," the Arsenal legend said on Instagram. "I am disappointed. I'm tired."

STUART BAXTER

The well-travelled coach was sacked by Indian Super League side Odisha for comments after a defeat to Jamshedpur. "I don't know when we're going to get a penalty. I think one of my players would have to rape someone or get raped himself if he was going to get a penalty," he said on TV. "Odisha FC has decided to terminate head coach Stuart Baxter's contract with immediate effect," the club tweeted.

BREEL EMBOLO

The Switzerland and Monchengladbach forward was allegedly at an illegal lockdown party after his side's 2-2 Bundesliga draw with Stuttgart. German police allege that Embolo fled across a rooftop, but he claims that he simply went to visit a friend at a neighbouring flat: "It is false information. The apartment I was in was near the room where this party took place," he said.

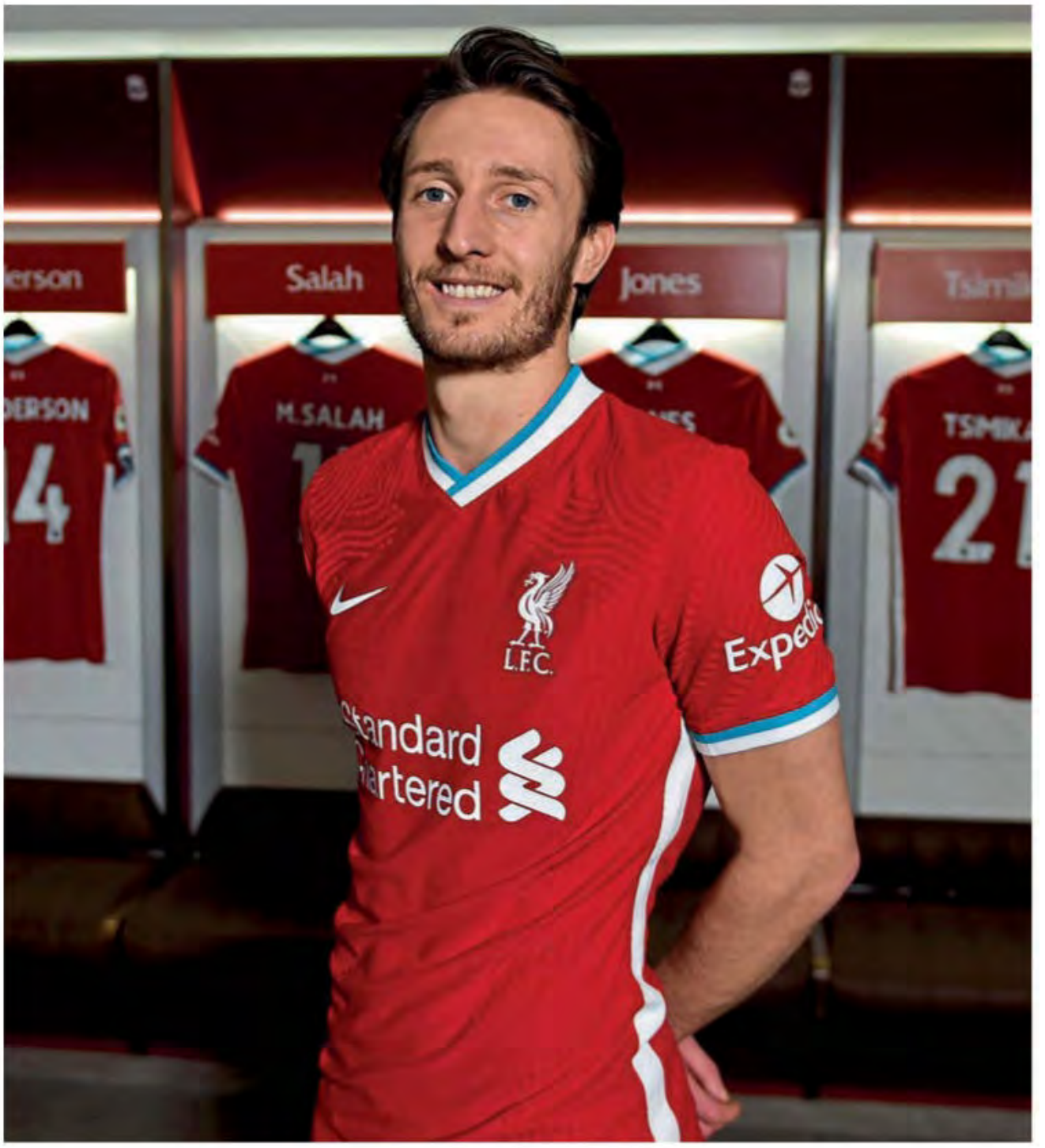
ANDRE ONANA

The Ajax goalkeeper's widely expected transfer to one of Europe's giants has been put on hold after he was handed a 12-month suspension for failing a doping test in October. The Amsterdam club claim it was accidental: "Onana was feeling unwell and wanted to take a pill to ease the discomfort. Unknowingly, however, he took Lasimac, a drug that his wife had previously been prescribed."

Banned…Andre Onana

"In a normal transfer window, we would not look at Preston… but since our situation got clearer and clearer – the problems we had – when we saw him we got really excited"

Jurgen Klopp on signing Ben Davies from Preston



Ben DAVIES

(Liverpool)

The 25-year-old centre-back's move from Preston North End to the Premier League champions was one of January's most unexpected transfers, not least because he had reportedly agreed to join Celtic at the end of his contract this summer.

The Reds' defensive injury crisis saw them seal a £1.6 million deal for the Preston man – plus Ozan Kabak on loan from Schalke – on the final day of the transfer window.

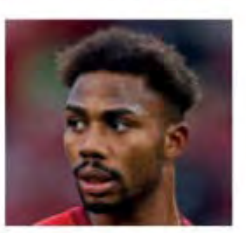
Having spent his entire career in the Football League, Davies will be ready for all the physical tussles that the Premier League can throw at him, yet he is also extremely comfortable on the ball. A natural left-footer, he has regularly played full-back and could offer cover for Andy Robertson too.

It will be the stuff of fairy tales if he can seize his opportunity at one of the world's biggest clubs.

ADOLFO GAICH
(Benevento)
The highly-rated Argentina striker's move to CSKA Moscow didn't work out, but he could be a shrewd loan signing for Pippo Inzaghi's side.

DENNIS MAN
(Parma)
The exciting 22-year-old forward will hope to emulate fellow Romanian Adrian Mutu by dazzling for Parma, having joined from FCSB.

ILAIX MORIBA
(Barcelona)
The 18-year-old *La Masia* graduate made his first-team debut in the Copa del Rey, and has a €100m release clause.



HERNAN CRESPO
(Defensa y Justicia)
The former Argentina striker recently won the first trophy of his managerial career, the Copa Sudamericana.

EMMANUEL DENNIS
(Cologne)
The man who scored twice at the Bernabeu in last season's Champions League arrived in the Bundesliga on loan from Club Brugge.

OMAR RICHARDS
(Reading)
The former England Under-21 left-back has reportedly agreed to join Bayern Munich this summer as David Alaba's successor.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Solskjaer scepticism remains

What's the reality about Ole Gunnar Solskjaer as manager of Manchester United? It's a red devil to know.

When his side were easily beaten by Manchester City in the League Cup semi-final, a fourth defeat in four semis, the answer seemed clear: here is a man who forever flatters to deceive.

A couple of weeks later, thanks to a fine run of victories, Solskjaer's side were top of the Premier League and looking like credible title challengers.

Perhaps the truth was evident in another moment of this season – the goal conceded to Istanbul Basaksehir in a Champions League group fixture, when Demba Ba was allowed to run from the halfway line unopposed following a United corner. This was more than a nightmare; it should never happen to any team at any level.

That's the thing about Solskjaer, you can argue it any which way you wish.

Optimists are convinced he will prove all the doubters wrong and deliver a cascade of trophies to Old Trafford. Realists think the club are just wasting time while Solskjaer remains; talking incessantly about United's glory days of the past while rival clubs stride ahead with world-class leaders.

I have always been a sceptic. Solskjaer, it seems to me, is an accidental long-term manager of a great club – appointed not on the basis of significant previous achievements, but thanks to a honeymoon period as interim boss that culminated in an unexpected and supremely fortunate Champions League triumph away to PSG.

Two years later, he is still there, his time characterised by inconsistency – a good spell, a bad spell, a good spell, another bad one – and all without particular rhyme or reason. Each time he has been close to the sack, a surge of form has saved him.

It is more than reasonable to argue that this does him credit. Yet the same swings of fortune do not assail the very best managers of our age, like Jurgen Klopp, Pep Guardiola and Max Allegri.

That fourth semi-final defeat, a 2-0 loss at home to City, was typical of his time. Inspired by Bruno Fernandes, the club's best signing in several seasons, United were amid a streak of fine results taking them towards the top of the Premier League.

Solskjaer was buoyant beforehand. "No excuses now," was his battle cry, with Fernandes' influence on the club being compared to that of Eric Cantona's arrival 30 years ago.

Afterwards, well, oh dear. United's manager admitted that defeat was about "a lack of quality compared to City," having seen his team outplayed and Fernandes struggle in the heat of a major occasion.

His team had wilted in similar fashion in the Champions League, sustaining three defeats that knocked them out of the group. Was that the end for Solskjaer? While rumours abounded, the team perked up again, the manager kept smiling his boyish smile, adding former team-mate Darren Fletcher to his coaching staff.

> Solskjaer, it seems to me, is an accidental long-term manager of a great club

At the wheel...In March, Solskjaer will mark three years since taking the United job on a permanent basis

"Darren has the United DNA running through his veins, and he knows exactly what it takes to be a Manchester United player," said Solskjaer.

It was a worrying sign. It was one more admission that Solskjaer believes he can relentlessly trade on the past rather than develop as a manager with his own style and philosophy.

Football people love to think there is DNA of a club. It's just a myth; and a foolish one.

Arsene Wenger completely changed Arsenal as a club; from his combination play on the field to training methods guided by science. Jurgen Klopp brought his distinct *gegenpressing* tactics to Liverpool, a system he had used at Borussia Dortmund, and certainly not an Anfield tradition. That's what the finest managers do: impose their smart ideas rather than imitate others. Trophies are the consequence.

If we can observe anything about Solskjaer it's that his Manchester United are most effective as a counter-attacking team. It is a way to play, a way that can be successful, as Jose Mourinho has long showed.

Yet, two years into the job, isn't his United defence still too fragile and his team too inconsistent for this strategy to conjure a first Premier League title since Alex Ferguson's retirement?

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Jules Rimet: FIFA's greatest president, 100 years on

March 1, 2021 is a significant anniversary for football in every corner of the globe, as it marks 100 years since French lawyer Jules Rimet formally began his record 33-year reign as FIFA president.

Rimet was 47 when he took office, two years after becoming president of the French Football Federation. By the time he retired in 1954, FIFA's membership had risen from 12 to 85; it now stands at 211. Beyond expansion of the game's popularity, Rimet's historic legacy is launching the World Cup, whose status in popular culture transcends all of sport. He was not only FIFA's longest-serving president, but also by far the greatest.

Up to a point he was at one with fellow Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin, the creator of the modern Olympics. Both men recognised the evolution in England of "muscular Christianity" – the power of sport to generate not only physical but also moral and societal well-being.

Application was the point at which the two men's visions diverged.

Firstly, De Coubertin had a head start. He was ten years older than Rimet, better connected and had been a pioneer of the all-embracing Union of French Athletic Sports Societies. His Olympic revival bore fruit in Athens in 1896, eight years before even the founding of FIFA.

Secondly, the older man – formally Charles Pierre de Fredy, Baron de Coubertin – came from aristocracy. He considered exemplary leadership in sport the natural duty of the officer classes. In practice, a strict amateur ethos: sport for its own sake, not financial gain.

Rimet, on the other hand, believed that sport should be open to all and in every manner. As he said: "If the man who labours in a Peugeot factory all week can earn something extra to support his family then he should have the right to do so." He believed that international sport could unite the world, but to do so, it had to be professional.

His remarkable journey began on October 24, 1873, in the village of Theuley-les-Lavoncourt, eastern France. At the age of 11, he moved to Paris.

Rimet was a star pupil and a devout Roman Catholic whose social and religious background coloured his outlook on the world. While studying to enter law he helped create the Red Star club to open sporting opportunity to anyone and everyone. Rimet himself was no star player. He practised gymnastics, athletics and fencing but incorporated football into the Red Star network because of its increasing popularity.

This brought him to a crossroads. De Coubertin's USFSA supported the development of rugby but not association football because the English were perceived as having poisoned it with professionalism.

In 1907 the USFSA quit FIFA over its open-minded approach to the paid game. Rimet subsequently quit the USFSA to set up a French football league to bring France back into FIFA.

This raised his profile before the onset of World War I, where his service brought him recognition of a vastly different sort with three awards of the *Croix de Guerre* (War Cross).

Rimet was the obvious choice as president of the French Football Federation on the resumption of sporting activity in 1919. A year later he helped organise football at the Antwerp Olympics. At the time, FIFA needed a new president following the death of Englishman Daniel Woolfall in 1918. In the absence of anyone else, Rimet was elected.

The first decade tested all his leadership and diplomacy. The initial challenge was the withdrawal of the four British home nations in 1920, in opposition to membership applications from wartime enemies Germany, Austria and Hungary. Ultimately a fragile peace was achieved, but it did not last. Four years later, the British quartet quit in a huff over the issue of broken-time payments, which allowed Olympic competitors to be paid in order to make up for lost earnings while attending the Games. The British objected to this as poisoning the Olympics' amateur ethos.

The schism engendered by the

ABOVE: FIFA president... Rimet in 1925

ABOVE RIGHT: Still gleaming...the Jules Rimet trophy (left) alongside the later redesigned FIFA World Cup trophy

> Rimet was not only FIFA's longest-serving president, but also by far the greatest

Amateur v Professional dispute was a source of great bitterness. However, it served an unwitting purpose in spurring Rimet's ambition to create an international championship.

His timing was perfect as the expansion of a pan-European railway network fed an appetite for increasing internationalisation. At this point, Rimet risked being upstaged by the ambition of Hugo Meisl. The Austrian drove the creation of the Central European International Cup for national teams and the Mitropa Cup for clubs. FIFA refused to formally approve the competitions but happily collected the match-staging fees.

Rimet's creation of the World Cup was thus multi-faceted. It was a response to the impatience of the professional game, to the amateur insistence of the International Olympic Committee, to the refusal of the 1932 St. Louis Olympics organisers to consider staging football at all, to the need to keep the sceptical South Americans on board, to trump Meisl's ambition and to assert FIFA's command.

By the time Uruguay had been selected to host and underwrite the costs of the 1930 World Cup, FIFA also had an economic imperative following the 1929 financial crash.

In June 1930 Rimet boarded the Conte Verde at Villefranche-sur-Mer and sailed to Montevideo with the new World Cup trophy.

In fact Meisl's International Cup drew bigger crowds and headlines than most of the World Cup ties on the far-distant banks of the River Plate. But Rimet returned home with a tidy profit for FIFA, his reputation enhanced, his presidency secure and his World Cup established as football's ultimate prize.

The 1930s brought further complexities as its tide of violent nationalism swept across international sport: Hitler's 1936 Berlin Olympics, Mussolini's stage-managed 1934 World Cup, the absence of Franco's civil war-torn Spain from the 1938 finals and the gap in the draw left by Germany's Austrian Anschluss.

Much of the 1930s, within FIFA, was taken up in assuaging the increasingly truculent South Americans. They railed against a Eurocentric denial of effective representation and sent only a handful of weakened teams to the 1934 and 1938 World Cups, while repeatedly threatening to abandon FIFA altogether.

Keeping FIFA alive during World War II was beyond Rimet in France. He had to rely on an erratic postal service and the loyalty of Ivo Schricker, FIFA's German general secretary, who had been appointed when FIFA moved from Paris to Zurich in 1932.

Shricker spent much of the war resisting German attempts to gain control of FIFA. Once peace had been restored, Rimet reclaimed control, negotiated the return of the British home nations and revived the World Cup in Brazil in 1950. Acknowledgement came in 1946, with Rimet's name officially attached to the World Cup trophy itself.

By then Rimet was 72 and too weary to meet the demands of a changing world, in which the former colonies of Africa and Asia would pursue independence and change the map of both the globe and international sport.

Rimet delegated the pursuit of solutions by expanding the FIFA exco to an energetic panel comprising Italy's Ottorino Barassi – who would go on to play a key role in founding UEFA – and future FIFA presidents Ernst Thommen of Switzerland and England's Stanley Rous. Sensibly then, rather than cling stubbornly to power, Rimet retired in 1954. He died two years later.

Hindsight presents Rimet as a man of his time, of a colonial, Eurocentric era. He has had fierce critics, notably from loyalists to De Coubertin's Olympic cause. He has been accused of writing up FIFA's early history to suit himself, of playing down Uruguay's role in launching the World Cup, of acquiescing to the inter-war dictators, of resisting the creation of the confederations and of standing back in the early 1950s when the modern shape of FIFA was defined, for better or worse.

His death also brought an abrupt halt to a campaign to secure for him a Nobel Peace Prize. But Nobel winners come and go and, mostly, are soon forgotten. No one can ever say that about Jules Rimet and his World Cup.

WINNERS

CRISTIANO RONALDO
By scoring his 760th career goal, the Juventus forward overtook Josef Bican as the most prolific goalscorer in the history of football.

TOM KING
The Newport County goalkeeper scored from 96 metres against Cheltenham Town, setting a new record for the longest goal of all time.

ALCOYANO
The Spanish third-tier side dumped Real Madrid out of the Copa del Rey, winning 2-1 after extra-time in spite of going down to ten men.

LOSERS

ALEXANDRE JANKEWITZ
The Southampton midfielder was sent off just 70 seconds into his first Premier League start in the Saints' second 9-0 league defeat in two seasons.

BARCELONA
The Spanish giants are reportedly "on the verge of bankruptcy", with debts totalling over €1.1 billion, and players going unpaid at the end of 2020.

SEBASTIEN HALLER
Ajax allegedly forgot to include their all-time record signing in their Europa League squad for the knockout stages of the competition.

Jonathan WILSON
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

The misunderstood Marcelo Bielsa

Perhaps it was inevitable that Marcelo Bielsa should become part of England's increasingly tedious culture wars. He is, after all, foreign and unusual and challenges our preconceptions. He does not fit readily into the pre-existing templates. And so what is most striking about the criticism of him this season is how much of it has missed the point. At the same time, there are those at the other extreme who regard him as an infallible, messianic figure and refuse to countenance any doubts. But at the very least, questions about Bielsa should try to take him on his own terms.

English football, though, has never been very good at that. The bizarre furore earlier this season over Bielsa's preference for speaking to the media in Spanish stemmed from that same closed-mindedness. If he's really so clever, ran the jibe, how come he can't speak English after two years in Wetherby? To which there are three answers. First: linguistic ability is only one aspect of intelligence. Second: is it really beneficial for him to expend energy studying English when he could be studying opponents? And third: while he almost certainly could learn a dozen pre-set phrases to select from then parrot after games, who benefits from him doing that rather than giving his typically ponderous explanations? Not fans, not people who actually want to understand what is happening; really, only journalists with quotes pieces to file quickly.

The only real issue with language is whether Bielsa can communicate effectively with his players. At Leeds, given they apparently adore him and given his record, it would seem he is achieving that rather better than, say, the English-speakers Dave Hockaday or Paul Heckingbottom. His win percentage, at the time of writing, is higher even than that of Don Revie.

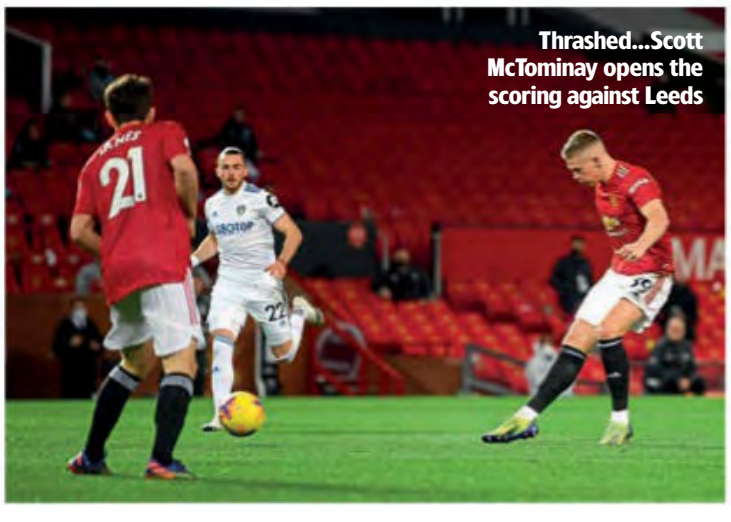
Misunderstood... Bielsa at Old Trafford

> He doesn't send sides out to attack remorselessly through some sense of romantic compunction: he does it because he believes it's his best chance of winning

The 6-2 defeat to Manchester United brought a widespread sucking of teeth and an insistence that Bielsa was naive, that he would have to learn the league, that you couldn't just go to Old Trafford and play like that. Which seemed oddly irrelevant. For 30 years Bielsa has been playing like that.

There are those who dismiss him as an idealist – and three league titles, an Olympic gold and promotion from the Championship is a meagre return in a career so feted – but he doesn't send sides out to attack remorselessly through some sense of romantic compunction: he does it because he believes it's his best chance of winning. He is, in his own way, a pragmatist.

That game was effectively decided by two goals in the first three minutes. The first was the result of Leeds' wide midfielders, Rodrigo and Mateusz Klich, pushing high up the pitch to create passing options. It was precisely that adventurousness that had caused Liverpool so many



Thrashed...Scott McTominay opens the scoring against Leeds

problems and earned such praise on the opening day of the season. But there is a reason why few sides play like that: if possession is turned over, as it was here, huge gaps open up. Scott McTominay drove into that space and scored.

The second goal was the result of an individual error from Klich, not tracking McTominay's run. Leeds did have chances to reduce the deficit to 2-1 before Bruno Fernandes added the third and perhaps had one been taken United would have wobbled. Perhaps they would have done had it remained 0-0 for longer. As it is, once you're 2-0 down after three minutes, the game is effectively done – particularly against a team as good on the counter as United.

Bielsa takes the risk because, while his team may suffer some heavy defeats, he believes unsettling the opposition by confronting them in a way with which they are unfamiliar will win more games than simply bunkering down and hoping for a breakaway. Perhaps he is right in that and perhaps wrong, but there is a need at least to frame the discussion around that basic principle.

Equally, it must be remembered that Leeds were promoted with the seventh-highest wage bill in the Championship. Even with a handful of biggish signings since, in most Premier League games they play they have the poorer players. Often they make mistakes. But where other managers might encourage their players to operate within their limits, Bielsa rarely seems critical of those who, say, misplace a pass. The result is that Leeds have a huge variance between playing well and badly: only Fulham have given the ball away more with unsuccessful touches but only Aston Villa have had more shots from inside the box.

Leeds often give away cheap goals, but they often score brilliant ones. That is what makes them such fun to watch. But the two go hand in hand. To talk about Leeds needing greater solidity is to deny the essence of what makes them, and Bielsa, who they are.

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Protest... "Jacques-Henri Eyraud: Marseille vomits you"

1 MARSEILLE MAYHEM

Rarely the most stable club in Europe, Marseille have descended into complete chaos in recent weeks. At the start of December they were second and very much in the running for the Ligue 1 title, yet a run of three wins in their next eight games saw them slip down to ninth. As a result – and in protest at Jacques-Henri Eyraud's presidency – over 100 ultras attacked the club's training ground, throwing smoke bombs and setting trees alight, with defender Alvaro Gonzalez struck with a projectile and suffering a minor back injury.

Police made 25 arrests and their home fixture against Rennes was postponed – but the madness didn't stop there. On transfer deadline day, coach Andre Villas-Boas resigned in protest at the signing of Olivier Ntcham, a replacement for Aston Villa-bound Morgan Sanson. "He was specifically a player that I said no to," the ex-Chelsea boss explained. "I learned of the signing when I woke up. I offered my resignation, saying I was not in agreement with the sporting strategy."

"I really liked Marseille, but I'm a professional," he added.

2 LOSING A JOB

During the online stream of Hamilton Academical v Ross County, the second half began with no commentary. "I hadn't pressed the wee button," eventually explained commentator Bobby Bulloch when his voice re-joined the action, before going a bit too far in his justification. "I was away for a jobby at half-time."

"Apologies if you deem that bad language, viewers," his embarrassed co-commentator replied, but Bulloch didn't slow down.

"Yeah sorry it was just a wee bit of poop, and I was a wee bit late back over because I had to squeeze quite a bit! Sorry I'll change the subject and get back to the match."

"The club didn't find this funny, and the person will not be used again. Our apologies for this," said Hamilton after the incident.

3 MAN OF THE MATCH

The Premier League is one of the most popular leagues in Norway, so there was understandably a great deal of excitement when Martin Odegaard, one of the country's brightest talents, joined Arsenal. At half-time in his first match against Manchester United, TV viewers voted the loanee the second-best player on the pitch, and by the 75th minute he had overtaken Bruno Fernandes as man of the match. The problem? He didn't come off the bench until the 83rd minute.

4 UNHAPPY HAIRDRESSERS

German football has come under fierce scrutiny from an unlikely source: the German Hairdresser Association. With salons across the country closed since December, the association wrote to the DFB to complain at the number of players who have clearly received a fresh trim – in spite of German salons being closed by the pandemic. "It is with great amazement we noticed that over the last match days of Bundesliga a vast majority of the professional footballers took to the pitch with new haircuts," the open letter read.

"The discontent with the top styled football pros is growing. They lead to customers calling and asking for work on the side and breaches of the corona regulations like visits at home."

5 COPPA CHAOS

While some extra-time periods can be tense affairs with little attention, Roma's 4-2 Coppa Italia defeat to Spezia was absolutely wild. Less than a minute after the restart, Roma's Gianluca Mancini was shown his second yellow card, and seconds later they were down to nine men, as goalkeeper Pau Lopez rushed out of his box and clattered into an onrushing Spezia forward. With a two-man advantage, the visitors went on to win 4-2, with a glorious chip from Riccardo Saponara, yet there was one more twist: Roma were subsequently handed an automatic 3-0 defeat for making one substitute too many.

Dismissed... Pau Lopez

"I'm not confident [he'll stay], but I'm hopeful… I still don't see Leo Messi in another shirt other than the Barca shirt"

Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman discusses Lionel Messi's future with *The Athletic*

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Loaned out… Jesse Lingard

EUROPE

Milan signed former Juventus and Croatia striker **MARIO MANDZUKIC** as a free agent. Meanwhile **SAMI KHEDIRA** left Juventus to join Hertha Berlin and **DEANDRE YEDLIN** exited Newcastle United for Galatasaray, both on free transfers.

Bayer Leverkusen completed a trio of signings from British clubs, adding Celtic defender **JEREMIE FRIMPONG**, Leicester winger **DEMARAI GRAY** and Manchester United full-back **TIMOTHY FOSU-MENSAH**. Celtic signed Everton right-back **JONJOE KENNY** on loan as a replacement.

Veteran striker… Mario Mandzukic

JANUARY 2021 TRANSFER ROUND-UP

Permanent… Said Benrahma

Ajax new boy… Sebastien Haller

Top talent… Nicolo Rovella

£22.9m **Dominik Szoboszlai** RB Salzburg to RB Leipzig
£20.25m **Sebastien Haller** West Ham United to Ajax
£20m **Said Benrahma*** Brentford to West Ham United
£16.2m **Nicolo Rovella**** Genoa to Juventus
£16m **Morgan Sanson** Marseille to Aston Villa
£15m **Gerard Deulofeu** Watford to Udinese
£12.4m **Pedro** Fiorentina to Flamengo
£11.7m **Dennis Man** FCSB to Parma
£11.7m **Krepin Diatta** Club Brugge to Monaco
£11.5m **Jeremie Frimpong** Celtic to Bayer Leverkusen
£9m **Antonio Sanabria** Real Betis to Torino
£9m **Joakim Maehle** Genk to Atalanta
£8.1m **Carlos Fernandez** Sevilla to Real Sociedad
£8.1m **Kouadio Kone**** Toulouse to Borussia Monchengladbach
£7.65m **Filip Stevanovic**** Partizan Belgrade to Manchester City
£7.2m **Elia Petrelli** Juventus to Genoa
£6.3m **Irfan Kahveci** Istanbul Basaksehir to Fenerbahce
£5.85m **Lucas Verissimo** Santos to Benfica
£5.5m **Papu Gomez** Atalanta to Sevilla
£5m **Joshua King** Bournemouth to Everton
£4.91m **Brenden Aaronson** Philadelphia Union to RB Salzburg
£4.91m **Mark McKenzie** Philadelphia Union to Genk
£4.5m **Aleksandr Kokorin** Spartak Moscow to Fiorentina
£4m **Moises Caicedo** Independiente del Valle to Brighton
£3.6m **Bas Dost** Eintracht Frankfurt to Club Brugge

*(*Loan deal made permanent)*
*(**Remaining at club on loan)*

LOAN DEALS

Martin Odegaard Real Madrid to Arsenal
Moussa Dembele Lyon to Atletico Madrid
Arkadiusz Milik Napoli to Marseille
Luka Jovic Real Madrid to Eintracht Frankfurt
Takefusa Kubo Real Madrid to Getafe
Willian Jose Real Sociedad to Wolves
Ainsley Maitland-Niles Arsenal to West Bromwich Albion
Fikayo Tomori Chelsea to Milan
Joe Willock Arsenal to Newcastle United
Jean-Philippe Mateta Mainz to Crystal Palace
Carles Alena Barcelona to Getafe
Mbaye Diagne Galatasaray to West Bromwich Albion
Patrick Cutrone Wolves to Valencia
Jean-Clair Todibo Barcelona to Nice
Daniele Rugani Juventus to Cagliari
Ruben Vinagre Wolves to Famalicao
Rabbi Matondo Schalke to Stoke City
Mat Ryan Brighton to Arsenal
Cenk Tosun Everton to Besiktas
Henry Onyekuru Monaco to Galatasaray
Filip Benkovic Leicester to OH Leuven
Danny Drinkwater Chelsea to Kasimpasa

"It's fantastic news for Fenerbahce…I think he can be the piece of the puzzle to make them even more of a threat to win the Turkish league"

Mesut Ozil's former manager Arsene Wenger speaks to *beIN SPORTS* about the playmaker's move to Turkey

Appointments, sackings and loans

USA striker **JORDAN MORRIS** left Seattle Sounders to join Championship high-flyers Swansea on loan for the rest of the season, while Roma snapped up promising right-back **BRYAN REYNOLDS** on loan from FC Dallas.

Marseille and Juventus exchanged two promising young players, with winger **MARLEY AKE** heading to Turin and midfielder **FRANCO TONGYA** joining the French club.

Manchester United sent out several players on loan, including **JESSE LINGARD** (West Ham), **FACUNDO PELLISTRI** (Alaves) and **TAHITH CHONG** (Club Brugge). Bayern Munich loaned out **CHRIS RICHARDS** to Hoffenheim and **JOSHUA ZIRKZEE** to Parma, while **SEBASTIANO ESPOSITO** joined Venezia on loan from Inter.

Bundesliga strugglers Schalke signed **SHKODRAN MUSTAFI** and **KLAAS-JAN HUNTELAAR** on free transfers from Arsenal and Ajax respectively.

Back at Schalke…Huntelaar

Southampton signed Liverpool forward **TAKUMI MINAMINO** on loan, before shipping out striker **SHANE LONG** on loan to Bournemouth.

Bordeaux and Fulham exchanged loanees, with **JOSH MAJA** moving to London and **JEAN MICHAEL SERI** heading back to France.

Highly-rated QPR winger **BRIGHT OSAYI-SAMUEL** joined Fenerbahce, shortly before the Turkish club also confirmed the signing of playmaker **MESUT OZIL** from Arsenal.

After ten years at Chelsea and several spells on loan to clubs in Spain, Germany, Netherlands, Portugal and Italy, **LUCAS PIAZON** left permanently for Braga.

Former Manchester United midfielder **SHINJI KAGAWA** joined Greek side PAOK. He was without a club since his release from Real Zaragoza in October.

New club…Shinji Kagawa

SOUTH AMERICA

MARCOS ROJO left Manchester United to return to Argentina and join Buenos Aires giants Boca Juniors.

HULK joined Brazilian Serie A side Atletico Mineiro after his contract expired with Chinese Super League club Shanghai SIPG.

Colombia appointed Chile coach **REINALDO RUEDA** as their new boss, replacing the sacked Carlos Quieroz.

CONCACAF

Chicago Fire agreed for 17-year-old Colombian **JHON JADER DURAN** to join the club from Envigado next January, making him the youngest international signing in MLS history. **LISANDRO LOPEZ** joined Atlanta United from Racing in Argentina, and Vancouver Whitecaps signed **DEIBER CAICEDO** from Deportivo Cali.

PHIL NEVILLE replaced Diego Alonso as Inter Miami coach, Toronto installed **CHRIS ARMAS** as their new boss and D.C. United appointed **HERNAN LOSADA**.

OUT

Released…Sokratis

Euro 2016 hero…Ashley Williams

EUROPE

Former Swansea City and Wales captain **ASHLEY WILLIAMS** announced his retirement aged 36, as did former Borussia Dortmund utility man **KEVIN GROSSKREUTZ**.

Arsenal released centre-back **SOKRATIS PAPASTATHOPOULOS**, who only days later signed a two-year deal with Greek champions Olympiakos.

Belgian side Cercle Brugge sacked coach **PAUL CLEMENT** after the club claimed just one win in 13 games.

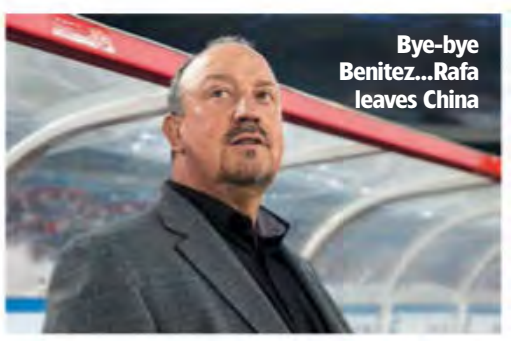
English Championship outfit Cardiff City sacked **NEIL HARRIS** and replaced him with **MICK McCARTHY** until the end of the season.

CONCACAF

Former New York Red Bulls, Inter Miami, Kaiserslautern and United States goalkeeper **LUIS ROBLES** announced his retirement, ending a 14-year career.

ASIA

RAFAEL BENITEZ left his job as coach of Dalian Professional in China after 18 months in charge. **GRAZIANO PELLE** left Shandong Luneng, where he was one of the world's highest-paid players, to join Parma.



Bye-bye Benitez…Rafa leaves China

"I was happy for the England team in 1966 and Big Jack [Charlton] did a great job. But you can't help thinking about what might have been"

Peter Swan on his ban from football before the 1966 World Cup

OBITUARIES

Remembered... Real Betis players pay tribute to John Mortimore

JOHN MORTIMORE
(1934-2021)
As a centre-half, Mortimore spent the majority of his playing career at Chelsea, starring in the League Cup-winning side of 1965, before going on to a successful managerial career. After spells at Greek side Ethnikos Piraeus and Portsmouth, he took charge of Benfica – in two separate spells – winning the league in both 1977 and 1987, plus back-to-back Portuguese Cups in 1986 and 1987. He also managed Real Betis, Belenenses and, briefly, Southampton, before later becoming a club president at The Dell.

PETER SWAN
(1936-2021)
Swan joined Sheffield Wednesday in 1953 and left in 1973, but only played 275 league games due to an eight-year ban from football. In 1962, the centre-half, along with two team-mates, placed a bet on his side to lose to Ipswich Town, with the Owls subsequently going down 2-0. An investigation by *The Sunday People* uncovered the scandal, and Swan was handed a four-month jail sentence and a lifetime ban from football.

Although his ban was lifted in 1972, allowing him to re-join his former club, Swan's career was unfulfilled. He won 19 England caps between 1960 and 1962, and may well have been in contention for World Cup selection in 1966.

FRANK AROK
(1932-2021)
The Serbian worked as a coach in Australia for over 30 years, most notably taking charge of the national team for six years in the 1980s.

JUSTO TEJADA
(1933-2021)
The striker spent nine years at Barcelona, scoring 92 goals in 194 games, after joining in 1952. In 1957 he played in the very first game at the Nou Camp, setting up the first goal in the stadium's history and scoring the second himself. He joined the club's greatest rivals, Real Madrid, in 1961 and spent two years there, before ending his career at Barca's second-greatest rivals, Espanyol.

LUTON SHELTON
(1985-2021)
Jamaica's record scorer with 35 goals, Shelton made his name at Kingston side Harbour View before moving to Europe to play for Helsingborgs, Sheffield United, Valerenga, AaB, Karabukspor and finally, Volga Nizhny Novgorod. He returned to his first club in 2017 to play one more game – and score one last goal – before retiring. He passed away at the age of 35, having suffered with a form of motor neurone disease since 2018.

YVON DOUIS
(1935-2021)
A scorer of almost 200 Ligue 1 goals with Lille, Le Havre, Monaco and Cannes, the striker also won 20 France caps and scored four times. He played at the 1958 World Cup and scored in the third-place play-off match against West Germany.

Mehrdad Minavand... qualifying for the 1998 World Cup

Jamaica legend... Luton Shelton

Jozef Venglos... in charge of Celtic

GUSTAVO PENA
(1942-2021)
The defender won 82 caps for Mexico between 1961 and 1974, captaining the team at the 1966 World Cup and again in 1970, when Mexico were hosts. He hit the winning goal against Belgium in the 1970 group stage, which guaranteed the team a place in the quarter-finals for the first time in their history, where they lost 4-1 to eventual finalists Italy.

CHRISTOPHER MABOULOU
(1990-2021)
French-born Congo international who played for Chateauroux, Bastia, PAS Giannina, Nancy and Evian. He suffered a heart attack in a kickabout with friends.

Mark Gleeson

MEHRDAD MINAVAND
(1975-2021)
No Iranian player made more Champions League appearances than Minavand, who featured 21 times in the competition in three years at Austrian side Sturm Graz, where he was part of the double-winning side of 1998-99. The left-sided midfielder also won 68 international caps, scoring four goals, and featuring at the 1998 World Cup.

JEAN KALALA N'TUMBA
(1949-2021)
Winner of the Africa Cup of Nations with Zaire in 1974 and also played at the World Cup in West Germany the same year. He won the African Champions Cup with AS Vita Club in 1973. His son Zico Tumba also played for DR Congo.

Mark Gleeson

JOZEF VENGLOS
(1936-2021)
Venglos had an extraordinary managerial career that lasted almost 40 years and took him to Australia, Portugal, Malaysia, England, Turkey, Oman and Scotland.

Assistant coach when Czechoslovakia won Euro '76, he took charge four years later when the team finished third. He returned to guide the side to Italia '90, then became the first non-British or Irish person to take charge of an English top-flight club by taking the Aston Villa job.

He claimed another significant record by becoming Slovakia's first-ever coach following their independence in 1993, and also managed Celtic in 1998-99, overseeing a 5-1 defeat of Rangers.

NEW! From the publishers of WorldSoccer

World Soccer Presents

Save 15%

A new bi-monthly 100-page souvenir bookazine from ***World Soccer***, continuing with ***Greatest Rivalries***, which focuses on international and club football's biggest and most controversial derby clashes.

Subscribe today and pay just £40.94 every 6 issues

Great reasons to subscribe

- *Pay just £40.94 for 6 issues – saving 15% on the shop price*
- *Each issue delivered directly to your door for **FREE***

Subscribe online at shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSP120 or call 01959 543 747 quote code WSP120

Calls charged at your standard network rate. Lines are open 8am-5.30pm Monday to Friday.

Terms and conditions: Offer available for UK customers only. You will pay £40.94 every 6 issues saving 15%. For overseas rates please visit shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSP. Full UK subscription rate for 6 issues is £47.94, USA & EU £54, RoW £60. Here at Kelsey Publishing we take your privacy very seriously and will only use your personal information to administer your account and to provide the products and services you have requested from us. We will only contact you about our special offers via the preferences you have indicated, and you can update these at any time by emailing us at cs@kelsey.co.uk or by calling us on 01959 543 747.

Wayne Rooney

England and Manchester United legend hangs up his boots

Few players have announced their arrival in English football quite as explosively as a 16-year-old superstar did in 2002.

"Remember the name," trilled a delighted Clive Tyldsley. "Wayne Rooney!"

The Everton boy-wonder had just opened his Premier League account with a stunning winner against league champions Arsenal, and was about to take the football world by storm.

His retirement, in contrast, could hardly have been more understated. On January 15, Rooney was confirmed as Derby County's new manager after a period as player-caretaker-manager, thus ending his playing days. His final game, a 3-0 defeat to Middlesbrough that had left the side rooted to the bottom of the Championship, had come almost two months earlier.

"Normally this happens at the end of a season and as a player you'd have time to reflect," he said during his first press conference as boss. "My future, I feel, is in management. I've had a great career; I've enjoyed every minute.

"Hopefully now I can start to write some history and make a successful managerial career."

In his 19-year career, Rooney scored 313 goals for Everton, Manchester United, D.C. United and Derby, in the process becoming the Red Devils' record scorer.

If one of those strikes were to sum him up as a player, the stunning 25-yard volley against Newcastle at Old Trafford in 2005 does the best job. The build-up features a furious Rooney arguing with the referee, a typically foul-mouthed tirade streaming from his mouth. He seems barely aware of the ball as it is hooked up field. Then, as it is headed into his path, he puts his foot through it as if it is the referee's head.

It is a ten-second spell that perfectly encapsulates peak-Rooney: fierce temperament, bullish power, and impeccable technique. At his best he was a force of nature, always on the edge, capable of changing a match at any moment; either with a moment of genius or a loss of temper.

Often, that short temper would define his international career. His first World Cup was ended by a red card for a stamp on Portugal's Ricardo Carvalho; his second marked by an on-pitch rant against England fans booing the team after a dreadful 0-0 draw with Algeria. He also missed the first two matches of Euro 2012 having been sent off in the final qualifying match.

Injuries played their part too. At his first, and best, major tournament, Euro 2004, he looked set to fire England to the final until an injury against Portugal in the quarter-finals. Two years later, a broken metatarsal meant he was short of his best in Germany, too.

Arguably the greatest talent of the so-called "Golden Generation", Rooney's greatest criticism was his failure to lead England to a trophy, or even a semi-final. The two best scoring seasons of his career (2009-10 and 2011-12, when he scored 34 goals in all competitions), both ended with major tournaments, yet he failed to deliver at either of them. For many, he failed to replicate his club form on the international stage when it most mattered, even if he did win 120 caps and break the all-time goal record.

> "Hopefully now I can start to write some history and make a successful managerial career"

New chapter... Rooney arrived at Derby in August 2019

Incidentally, that is not a record that he expects to last: "Harry Kane will break it in a couple of years," he told Amazon Prime last year. "I want him to break it, I think it'll be great. I'm looking forward to presenting him with the trophy for doing it, just like Bobby Charlton did for me."

The suggestion that Rooney could have achieved more is given further mileage by comparisons to his former team-mate, Cristiano Ronaldo.

Born just eight months apart, the pair – alongside Carlos Tevez – formed one of the most formidable attacks in Premier League history, winning three titles in a row and the 2008 Champions League, before losing to Barcelona in the final a year later. In the five years they played together, Rooney and Ronaldo scored 215 goals between them, each averaging around 0.4 per game. Yet the Portuguese forward's career scaled even greater heights after he left for Real Madrid.

"Sometimes you get this feeling that people think Rooney never achieved what he should have, or he never did what Ronaldo did. But Ronaldo's a freak!" said Jamie Carragher on *Monday Night Football*. "Wayne Rooney's career is unbelievable," the former Liverpool defender added. "The only thing he didn't do was win something

Lethal attack... Rooney played with Ronaldo between 2004 and 2009

Record breaker... Bobby Charlton presented Rooney with a Golden Boot to honour his England goal record

for his country and become the best player in the world, but when he was at his peak he was there or thereabouts."

Rooney was so good, so young, expectations for him were set at an impossibly high level. In another era, without the feats of Ronaldo or Lionel Messi to be compared to, perhaps he would have been more appreciated.

His managerial career has started well, if unspectacularly, with Derby slowly moving up the league. It is a far cry from the job that former team-mate Frank Lampard took in 2018, when Mason Mount, Fikayo Tomori and Harry Wilson arrived on loan.

In November, Mel Morris agreed to sell the club to Sheikh Khaled, a cousin of Manchester City owner Sheikh Mansour, but at the time of writing, the takeover has not been completed. County players were paid late in December and placed under a brief transfer embargo as a result, while Rooney has deferred part of his wages.

There are also problems on the pitch – literally. Budget cutbacks and poor weather has left the Pride Park turf in an awful state, so slick, passing football is out of the question for now.

Unlike his playing career, where he was a world star from virtually his first kick, Rooney faces a tough journey to the top of the managerial world. But he seems ready for the fight.

Jamie Evans

Guus Hiddink

Experienced coach bidding to reach his fourth World Cup with Curacao

Guus Hiddink already has an impressive World Cup pedigree. He took a disparate and ego-filled Netherlands squad to the quarter-finals in the USA in 1994, and eight years later guided an extraordinarily fit South Korea on a fairy-tale run to the last four.

He also qualified Australia by orchestrating an upset of Uruguay in the qualifying play-off for a place at the 2006 finals, and then got the Socceroos past the first round in Germany before a controversial loss to Italy.

But, at the age of 74, the Dutchman wants more and is attempting to take the tiny island of Curacao to the finals for the first time, aiming for a place in Qatar next year, beginning the bid with their opening qualifiers at home to St. Vincent and the Grenadines and then away in Cuba at the end of March.

Curacao are one of the seeded teams in the first group stage, where just a single round of matches is being played, and their biggest threat will be Guatemala, who they host in June.

The group winner advances to a play-off round. If they get through that, there will be a final group stage, where the likes of Mexico and USA are already placed.

"That is going to be a difficult task," says Hiddink, "but we are going to do everything we can to get there."

Curacao are ranked ninth in the CONCACAF region, who have three and a half places at the Qatar World Cup, and 82nd overall. Hiddink believes they could reach the top 30.

It is a massive ask for a country with a population just over 150,000, but the colonial ties with the Netherlands means he could yet make a decent tilt at it, with several players in the Dutch youth teams possessing ancestral links to the tiny Caribbean island.

"I thought it was really special when I was asked a while ago. I've been around the world a bit, but never in this part of the world," Hiddink said on his first trip to the island in November to run his eye over his squad.

Since then he has been to the Netherlands, courting players he hopes can strengthen the team and make realistic their chances. Patrick van Aanholt was one such target, with the Crystal Palace left-back called up by Curacao in 2017 without playing, although that opportunity ended in November when he played in the UEFA Nations League. Jurgen Locadia however, formerly of Brighton and Hove Albion, is expected to agree to play for Hiddink.

Under former Netherlands striker Patrick Kluivert, who managed the team for just over a year between 2015 and 2016, Cardiff City's Leandro Bacuna and Columbus Crew goalkeeper Eloy Room were enlisted, having previously represented Dutch youth teams, as was striker Rangelo Janga, who now has 11 goals in 19 caps. Former Everton defender Cuco Martina is the country's captain and most-capped player.

> It is a massive ask for a country with a population just over 150,000, but the colonial ties with the Netherlands means he could yet make a decent tilt at it

With one or two more experienced additions, the team will have a realistic chance of reaching Qatar, giving their manager hope of yet another World Cup trip.

Mark Gleeson

Hero...Hiddink celebrates with the South Korea players at the 2002 World Cup

Chelsea

Roman Abramovich hires his 11th full-time manager since 2003

When Frank Lampard was appointed Chelsea manager in 2019, he might have known that his tenure would ultimately end with his sacking. After all, few people have a better understanding of Roman Abramovich's running of the club than Lampard: only John Terry has played more games for the Blues since they were bought by the Russian in 2003.

Indeed, as an example of just how ruthless the corridors of power at Stamford Bridge can be, the third player on that list, Petr Cech, now a technical adviser at the club, was a key figure in the decision to sack his former team-mate of ten years.

"When I took on this role I understood the challenges that lay ahead in a difficult time for the football club," Lampard said in a statement after departing the club. "I am proud of the achievements that we made, and I am proud of the academy players that have made their step into the first team and performed so well."

Ultimately, Lampard was a victim of the club's improved fortunes. The job he took in 2019 was completely different to the one that faced him in 2020-21.

When he arrived, talisman Eden Hazard had just departed for Real Madrid and the club were facing a transfer embargo. The only new additions to the squad were to come from youth: Tammy Abraham, Mason Mount, Reece James and Fikayo Tomori returned from successful loans in the Championship, with Christian Pulisic the only new face, having agreed to join from Borussia Dortmund the previous January.

Their academy, widely regarded as one of the best in Europe, had not produced a regular first-team player since Terry. Yet with the club's all-time top scorer assisted by Jody Morris, the man who had overseen so much of the youth team's success, it seemed, that a new era was ready to begin at Chelsea.

In finishing fourth and reaching the FA Cup final, Lampard did not achieve miracles in his only full season. This, after all, was a team that had finished third the year before and won the Europa League, while their 7-1 aggregate defeat to Bayern Munich in the second round of the Champions League indicated that there was plenty of work to do. Nevertheless, he achieved the club's primary target – Champions League qualification – and successfully integrated several young players into the squad.

Yet in doing so, he well may have caused his own demise.

Chelsea announced their return to the Champions League by spending well over £200 million on Hakim Ziyech, Timo Werner, Ben Chilwell, Thiago Silva, Kai Havertz and Edouard Mendy. Over the course of one summer, the nature of Lampard's job was transformed from developing a young and exciting group, to overseeing one of the most expensively assembled squads in Europe.

In Frank We Trust... a fans' banner during Lampard's final match in charge, a 3-1 FA Cup win over Luton

As always, when spending goes up, patience goes down. Lampard struggled to get to grips with his new charges, experimenting with new systems and formations, and results suffered. He was relieved of his duties on January 25, following a run of one win in five Premier League games, with the team ninth in the table. It is fair to say that a manager without Lampard's playing CV at Stamford Bridge may not have lasted so long.

> Ultimately, Lampard was a victim of the club's improved fortunes. The job he took in 2019 was completely different to the one that faced him in 2020-21

Chelsea acted with the haste of a club that had been plotting a change for some weeks, officially appointing Thomas Tuchel on an 18-month contract the very next day.

It has not been a universally popular appointment. The reaction on social media suggests that there is a divide between the global fan base, who had become frustrated by the team's

Pedigree...Tuchel won six trophies with PSG and reached last season's Champions League final

underperformance and were keen for change, and the local match-going fans, who were fully invested in the Lampard project.

Currently of course, there are no match-going fans, and this may be to Tuchel's advantage. In the past, Chelsea supporters have wasted no time in making their feelings known against unpopular appointments – Rafael Benitez was jeered by huge swathes of the crowd during his first home game after taking interim charge of the Blues in 2012, while Andre Villas-Boas and Maurizio Sarri faced pressure from the stands too.

Chelsea's most popular and successful bosses of the last 20 years – Jose Mourinho, Carlo Ancelotti and Antonio Conte – valued solid defences and ruthlessly efficient attacks; Tuchel's opening game saw the team complete 820 passes in a 0-0 draw with Wolves. If the team are not playing winning, attacking football when fans return to the stadium, it could be a hostile environment for the German.

As for the players, who will be the winners and losers from the change? Chelsea were said to have specifically targeted a German-speaking coach, so naturally much is expected of Havertz and Werner in the new regime. Although Lampard championed academy graduates, Tuchel is unlikely to discard them. Mount and Abraham both started in the new manager's first win – a 2-0 victory over Burnley – while Callum Hudson-Odoi has, if anything, been more involved under the German.

The new manager has inherited a squad that is the envy of most of Europe, without the huge egos he was burdened with in Paris. His sharp, tactical mind and coaching ability should make for a successful combination.

As for Lampard, questions remain as to where he will go next. He has shown enough promise to land another job at the top of the Championship at the very least. Clearly he needs more experience to become an elite manager. Yet having already landed his dream job, does he have the appetite to build his way back up to the top? Only time will tell.

Jamie Evans

Phil Neville

Manager leaves England women to reunite with team-mate David Beckham at Inter Miami

Phil Neville launched his career as head coach of Inter Miami by stating: "One thing that really excites me is to prove people wrong."

The former Manchester United, Everton and England player will get plenty of opportunity to do that in Florida, with most observers suspecting he only got the job because of his long-time friendship with co-owner and club president David Beckham. Others query whether a foreign coach can succeed in winning MLS. The only one to do so in the last decade, Gerardo Martinez with Atlanta United in 2018, had two decades' experience behind him and came to MLS after roles at Barcelona and Argentina.

> "We don't just employ our friends. We employ the best people. We're running a serious soccer club here and we hire people we think are best suited"
>
> **Inter Miami owner David Beckham**

Neville's CV consists of three years in charge of England women following brief coaching spells at Manchester United and Valencia, and a match co-managing Salford City.

This is a fairly thin resume for the demanding task awaiting him in Fort Lauderdale – where Inter Miami actually play while their planned $996m stadium continues to inch towards fruition (ground is yet to be broken on a site contaminated with arsenic). In their debut MLS season Inter Miami finished tenth of 14 clubs in the Eastern Conference, winning seven games out of 23. They failed to make the play-offs after being knocked out in an elimination round by fellow expansion team Nashville 3-0.

For a team featuring Gonzalo Higuain and Blaise Matuidi, this was underwhelming. Thus the exit of Uruguayan coach Diego Alonso, who came to the club after winning the CONCACAF Champions League with Mexican clubs Pachuca and Monterrey.

Neville would not appear an obvious upgrade but Beckham insisted: "We don't just employ our friends. We employ the best people. We're running a serious soccer club here and we hire people we think are best suited. Phil is a natural leader, and I believe now is the right time for him to join."

Co-owner Jorge Mas added: "The fact that he's David's friend is a reality that we don't hide from, we embrace it. But he wasn't handed this job because of that. He earned it."

For his own part Neville, 44, said of Beckham: "He is my friend, but from two to three weeks ago he has been my boss. There will be times when we have difficult conversations. To build something here that can be bigger than anything we have done in our careers or our lives is something that excites."

Both men spoke of bringing through young players, but at most clubs staying around to achieve such long-term goals requires short-term success. Mas suggested Miami will be no different when he said: "We won't settle for mediocrity."

To that end, while Neville talked of winning cultures, hard work and immersing himself in the job and city, perhaps as important is the simultaneous hiring of Chris Henderson, previously of Seattle Sounders, to be chief soccer officer and sporting director. Neville faces a steep learning curve. Henderson's contacts and experience may help him climb it. If not Neville and Beckham could be having one of those difficult conversations.

Glenn Moore

Reunion...Beckham and Neville came through the Manchester United academy together

Ravel Morrison

The troubled midfielder is searching for the 12th club of his career

Less than four months into a season-long contract, Ravel Morrison's time with ADO Den Haag – his 11th different club in nine years – was brought to an end by mutual consent in January.

Morrison was highly regarded as a youth in Manchester United's academy. Rio Ferdinand, Wayne Rooney and Gary Neville have all spoken about the midfielder's jaw-dropping displays in early first-team training sessions, and Sir Alex Ferguson is said to have rated the 17-year-old Morrison as a better prospect than Ryan Giggs at the same age.

But Morrison became renowned for being difficult to work with, inattentive and a troublemaker. Brushes with the law and the FA led to United giving up on the gifted youngster in 2012, selling him to West Ham – whose manager at the time, Sam Allardyce, would come to consider him "the biggest waste of talent I ever worked with".

> "He needs to find an environment where he's a key player and plays every week"
>
> **Former Ostersunds manager Ian Burchnall**

The reputation Morrison earned in his late teens has stuck. Those who have worked with the former England youth international in recent years, though, have found negative perceptions of the player to be wide of the mark.

"You're expecting some monster with six heads to come walking through the door," says David Preece, goalkeeping coach at Ostersunds FK, where Morrison played in 2019. "There was always that feeling of, maybe it's a gamble to bring in somebody who could be divisive to the squad. But nothing could have been further from the truth."

"What impressed me about him was his attitude," adds David Webb, Ostersunds' former director of football. "He was quite a humble lad."

The misdemeanours of his past are well known; their root causes less so. Morrison grew up in a deprived area of Manchester, had an unstable family life and was diagnosed with ADHD at a young age, for which it is thought he was never properly treated.

"All I can say is that it's not his fault," says Tony Whelan, Manchester United's assistant academy manager. "And that's the sadness. He was a victim of circumstances."

Still, Morrison's reputation has preceded him in every move he has made, to the point it has become self-fulfilling. "All these managers can't be wrong," said Neil Warnock, who started the player just once while Middlesbrough manager. As such, Morrison has struggled to find a suitable home.

Released...Morrison played five games for ADO Den Haag

Young Devil...In 2011, Morrison won the FA Youth Cup alongside the likes of Jesse Lingard, Paul Pogba and Michael Keane

In 2015, he joined Lazio. He made just four Serie A appearances for the club and was effectively frozen out, made to train with the reserves, and when Simone Inzaghi took charge he decided the Englishman was surplus to requirements. Igli Tare, Lazio's sporting director, privately expressed sympathy for Morrison upon releasing him to join Ostersunds and thus agreed to waive any sell-on clauses.

Glimmers of Morrison's gifts were on show during a 2017-18 loan to Atlas in Liga MX, but he found the club in turmoil, changing managers and with defender Rafael Marquez facing allegations of being involved in drug trafficking.

A brief spell with Ostersunds proved restorative. Morrison found a club willing to put faith and trust in him, and he reciprocated with his best form in years. He finally felt part of a team, too. He befriended the club's kit man, a refugee from Darfur, buying him an iPad to use on away trips and offering to fund travel back to his homeland. Morrison bought Ostersunds jerseys for young fans and mentored the club's young players.

Injury limited Morrison to just nine appearances in his half-season in Sweden, but he performed well enough to earn a shot at Premier League redemption with newly promoted Sheffield United in the summer of 2019.

One person with knowledge of the situation admits Sheffield United "took a punt" on Morrison, though, and that he was never an obvious tactical fit. "Even if he had done well," they say, "he'd have been a square peg in a round hole."

Midway through the season, unable to crack Chris Wilder's line-up, Morrison was loaned to Middlesbrough in the Championship. He lacked match fitness upon his arrival at the Riverside but was liked by manager Jonathan Woodgate. When he was replaced by Warnock, though, the new boss felt he couldn't invest the time required to get Morrison up to speed.

With Morrison's loan agreement not accounting for a later-than-expected end to the season due to the pandemic, a wrangle ensued between Middlesbrough and Sheffield United; neither side wanted him.

And so came the move to Den Haag last summer. With virtually an entire squad bought and sold ahead of the season, the Dutch side were always likely to struggle. The official announcement of Morrison's release insisted club and player parted on amicable terms. Den Haag had won just one of their first 14 Eredivisie fixtures, of which Morrison had featured in only four.

"He needs to find an environment where he's a key player and plays every week," says former Ostersunds manager Ian Burchnall. "Not many clubs have bought him and said, 'Right, we're going to invest our energy into him to get out what we can.'"

What Morrison most needs – patience – is a luxury in football, and one the clubs willing to roll the dice on a player like him can ill afford.

Whether the talent he showed as a teen has been spent, or whether he is just waiting to find the right circumstances, Morrison, who turned 28 in February, is likely to remain an enigma.

Ryan Baldi

Ligue 1

Broadcasting dispute puts French top flight in financial jeopardy

In May 2018, it was announced that Mediapro, the Spanish broadcaster, had acquired rights to cover the majority of Ligue 1 games between 2020 and 2024 for €1.15 billion a year. A new company entering the fray with such financial muscle came as a shock for French football: Ligue 1 had never been broadcast by an entirely foreign company since it first appeared on TV in 1984.

Ahead of the 2020-21 campaign, Mediapro launched the subscription channel Telefoot to show games for €25.90 a month. Many French fans, who'd been used to watching domestic football as part of a wider European package, thought the price was very hefty to access French football alone.

The first game broadcast was a drab 0-0 draw between Bordeaux and Nantes, but viewers nonetheless applauded the quality of Telefoot's coverage. It didn't help. By the end of November, Telefoot had signed up just 480,000 subscribers - to break even they needed 3.5 million.

In November, Mediapro failed to pay Ligue 1's governing body, the Ligue de Football Professional (LFP), a €178 million tranche that was due, and the ensuing dispute quickly went to court.

Mediapro argued that the impact of COVID-19 on professional football, including the lack of fans in grounds affecting the TV spectacle, made a reduction in the price of the deal justifiable. But the LFP refused to discount their product and on December 11, the court announced an end to the partnership between the LFP and Mediapro.

Free to make another deal, the LFP immediately opened discussions with Canal+, France's major satellite channel. LFP president Vincent Labrune declared that he wouldn't agree to anything less than €800m, arguing that this would ensure the league's inherent value wouldn't be irreparably damaged. Canal+ balked at the idea and threatened to let go of the rights package they already had - worth €330m - claiming that under the circumstances there should be a new tendering process for all the packages the LFP had made available. The channel's head Maxime Saada claimed Canal+ had been mistreated by the LFP for years, and that the league would be breaking the law if they didn't put the rights up for tender.

Canal+ suggested showing the rest of the season's games via pay-per-view, similar to the Premier League at the end of last year. This idea was somewhat undermined by the fact that English fans had hated the concept, and the idea had been quickly scrapped. The LFP did not pursue it.

> By the end of November, Telefoot had signed up just 480,000 subscribers - to break even they needed 3.5 million

Instead, the remaining packages were put up for bidding, yet this didn't provide a solution either. Offers from Amazon, Eurosport and DAZN were all rejected by the LFP, while Canal+ did not even bid - in spite of insisting that the games be made available.

Once again, the LFP and Canal+ resumed negotiations and, eventually, a deal was reached. Their original agreement was reinstated, with the remaining Ligue 1 fixtures purchased for a reported fee of €35m. If true, that means the LFP will receive a total fee of around €670m for the season - less than half of the expected €1.15b.

For now, it is a stop-gap, affording the LFP time to arrange a new deal for next season, while the dream they were sold by Mediapro lies in tatters.

Howard Johnson

Mediapro...The broadcasters' agreement with Ligue 1 fell through in December

eyewitness

Emre Sarigul reports

TURKEY

Homecoming

There was no mass turnout at Istanbul airport on his arrival. No flares, no raucous welcome, no street parties. But make no mistake about it – the signing of Mesut Ozil was one of the biggest transfers in Fenerbahce's history.

Due to COVID restrictions on public gatherings, Fenerbahce fans were forced to the online realm to get behind their new man. Over 100,000 people tracked Ozil's flight from London to Istanbul. Fenerbahce's tweet announcing the Ozil signing received over 610,000 likes and 216,000 retweets.

The fans are excited. But they will demand results.

Sceptics will argue that the Fenerbahce administration has resorted to what major Turkish clubs have always done in the past when facing strain: throw money at a big name not exactly in the prime of their career to win over the masses. A short-term measure to hide long-term problems.

For years Turkish clubs have papered over the cracks. The major clubs in Turkey are technically owned by the fans, with a membership-based setup and presidents elected

Unveiling...Ozil during his first Fenerbahce press conference

Landing...Mesut arrives at Istanbul airport

every few years. A kind of footballing democracy; in theory anyway. In reality, due to a lack of checks and balances, the system has created a monster.

Club presidents at the major clubs only care about short-term success as it is the only way to ensure re-election. As a result they focus on today. Couple that with a lack of accountability and you have a corrosive cocktail of out of control spending, irresponsible governance and no long-term strategy. As club presidents do not spend out of pocket they are happy to squander millions. Nobody will question them regarding where the money went once they are gone.

The major Turkish clubs have millions of fans. Few clubs in the world can compete with the support they command. And that is what makes the current situation of Turkish football so tragic. It does have a lot of potential. But it has been woefully managed.

Fenerbahce president Ali Koc has been working towards alleviating the crippling debt, which he has revealed stands at £460 million. To be fair, so are their main rivals, Besiktas, Galatasaray and Trabzonspor. In fact, most teams in the Super Lig are hurtling towards economic oblivion. The league is not in a healthy place.

The Yellow Canaries shifted towards savvy low-cost transfers and poaching young talents. And they have been turning a profit in the transfer market: last summer Vedat Muriqi was sold to Lazio for around £16m; the year before, Eljif Elmas joined Napoli for £14.5m.

But Turkish football can be an unforgiving place for the traditional powers. For the likes of Fenerbahce, Galatasaray and Besiktas, anything other than winning the league is an unmitigated failure.

Koc and his board have worked tirelessly to reduce debt, reform the academy and modernise the way the club operates. Ultimately, none of it will matter in the theatre of public opinion unless they win silverware. And after seven years without a trophy the fans are desperate to end the drought.

While there is no denying this isn't the Ozil that won the 2014 World Cup with Germany, he is by no means at the end of his career just yet, aged 32 years old. And it is not exactly a final payday, as he would have earned more had he stayed at Arsenal. In fact, Fenerbahce revealed that Ozil will be earning €3m per-season on a three-year deal. There will be a €550,000 sign-on fee and he could earn an extra €1.75m in bonuses, but it still works out at an 80 per cent wage reduction. In other words he took a pay cut to play for the Istanbul giants.

He will still be the highest-paid player at Fenerbahce and with the current debt situation coupled with the weakness of the Lira to the Euro, it is by no means a cheap transfer for the club. But they will be able to justify it if they win the league and receive the financial rewards of qualifying for the Champions League group stage.

The narrative being pushed by Fenerbahce is simple: Ozil returning home. At first glance, this may seem bizarre considering he was born in Germany, but he is of Turkish heritage and professes that the Yellow Canaries were his first love. Ozil has made a big deal about his Turkish roots over the past few years. "I grew up as a Fenerbahce fan as a kid in Germany," he said on Twitter recently. "Every German-Turkish person supports a Turkish team when they grow up in Germany. And mine was Fenerbahce."

To which some Turkish fans ask: why didn't he opt to represent the Crescent-Stars at international level? For them, Ozil is having his cake and eating it.

Being brought up as the child of immigrants often results in an identity that isn't binary. Ozil was raised in a working-class neighbourhood where most of his neighbours were Turkish or of an immigrant background. He grew up speaking Turkish at home before learning German at school. Caught in between two cultures, Ozil was once the poster boy for social cohesion in Germany – picking up a Bambi award as a prime example of successful integration in German society.

Home...Mesut Ozil in his first training session at the club

After winning the World Cup in 2014, it was inconceivable that he would end up quitting the national team four years later, accusing the German FA of racism and using him as a scapegoat for the country's poor display at the 2018 World Cup. The fall out centred on Ozil posing for photographs with Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The events that unfolded saw the playmaker become more vocal about his Turkish roots. He felt he was German as long as he was successful and didn't step out of line: "I am German when we win, an immigrant when we lose," he said after quitting the German national team.

Perhaps a part of his decision to move to Turkey is to connect with his roots and to find a sense of belonging after being rejected by his country of birth. Many Fenerbahce fans genuinely believe Ozil turned down other clubs to join them because he wants to play for

his childhood team, so there will be a honeymoon period. But for how long?

There is no beating around the bush. Within the next six months, Ozil will either become a cult legend or the result of Fenerbahce fans going into complete meltdown. The transfer has brought with it an air of optimism. At the midway point of the season, the team was in second place, just two points off Besiktas with Galatasaray breathing down their necks in third – three points behind. This is seen as the best chance Fenerbahce have to win the league in years. Galatasaray and Besiktas are in a worse financial state than they are and reigning champions Istanbul Basaksehir are struggling for form in the bottom half.

> "I am German when we win, an immigrant when we lose"
>
> **Ozil after quitting the German national team in 2018**

The ball is in Ozil's court. He has had a tumultuous few years, from becoming Arsenal's highest-paid player in January 2018 to being ostracised from the squad in the final few months of his time at the club. Neither Unai Emery nor Mikel Arteta managed to get the best out of him. As well as falling out with the DFB, his relationship with the Arsenal board soured after they distanced themselves from comments he made in support of Uyghur Muslims in China. His refusal to take a pay-cut amidst the coronavirus pandemic only worsened the relationship.

The situation became irretrievable after Arteta decided not to register Ozil for their Premier League and Europa League squads. Whatever the real reason for that decision, the playmaker arrived in Turkey having not played a competitive game of football since March. Even when he was playing, he was not in the best of form, with three assists and just one goal last season.

His attitude has regularly been brought into question, often missing games with a recurring back injury. His laid-back body language is often misinterpreted as a sign that he isn't interested. He has been accused of spending more time playing Fortnite than football.

The Super Lig is a physical league. The traditional Turkish fan expects players to show qualities like passion, hard work, getting stuck in and giving their all for the badge. This isn't exactly Ozil. His style and Fenerbahce's is not exactly a perfect match. But as long as he delivers the goods it won't cause much of an issue.

Fenerbahce fans expect Ozil to step up, lead by example and bring back the glory years. At his best, he would undoubtedly be the best player in the league. But he will have a giant target on his head. Rival teams are going to do everything to shut him down, to prevent him playing. Rival fans will pounce on his every mistake.

And in Turkey there is no escape. There are several football only newspapers. Football is discussed for hours in chat show formats for most of the week on television. The country is absolutely crazy about the sport.

For the time being, Ozil will be shielded from the madness by COVID restrictions. But if the title race is tight towards the end of the season the atmosphere is going to be suffocating. Pressure can make diamonds but can also crush rocks to dust. It is make or break for Fenerbahce.

Cast out...Ozil's last game for Germany was the shock 2018 World Cup defeat to South Korea

Gunned out...Ozil on the Arsenal bench last June

eyewitness

John Duerden reports

QATAR

Inching closer

Almoez Ali...scoring against Paraguay

The 2022 World Cup takes place next year – let that sink in – and in Qatar, the clock really is ticking. Preparations were moving briskly along but the global pandemic has cast a shadow over the world of sport and now nothing is certain any more. At least organisers in Doha can watch and learn as tournaments such as the Olympics and European Championship – should they go ahead – try to deal with it first.

It is almost a surprise that Qatar are not participating in that latter competition as guests given their global commitments this year. In 2020 there was not much for the Asian champions to talk about, though there was just enough time late in the year to play four games. There was an expected 5-0 thrashing of Bangladesh, a 1-1 draw with Costa Rica and a 2-1 defeat against South Korea. There was some concern after a 5-1 drubbing at the hands of Ghana in October.

Past tournament hosts have often worried about the lack of competitive action that their teams have before the big games suddenly start on home soil with the pressure and expectations that home advantage brings. Not Qatar. There won't be the kind of huge demands for success that some predecessors have struggled with and there will be no shortage of competitive games in which to get ready. Qatar's challenge will be fitting them all in.

In December 2020, ten years after Sepp Blatter made his shock announcement in Zurich, this tiny country made headlines once again by entering qualification for the 2022 World Cup – in Europe. The Maroons have already started non-competitive qualification in Asia, joining Group E along with Oman, Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh. Sitting in first place with 16 points after six games, four points clear of Oman, if Qatar were not hosts then they would be on course to progress to the third and final group stage, but this is as far as they will be allowed to go (and it also means they will qualify for the 2023 Asian Cup). The second round should have been done and dusted by now but due to COVID-19 there are still two games to play.

This could lead to a fixture clash. In June, the Middle Easterners will head to Colombia to compete in the 2021 Copa America. There will be competitive games against the hosts as well as Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Venezuela. This will be their second successive

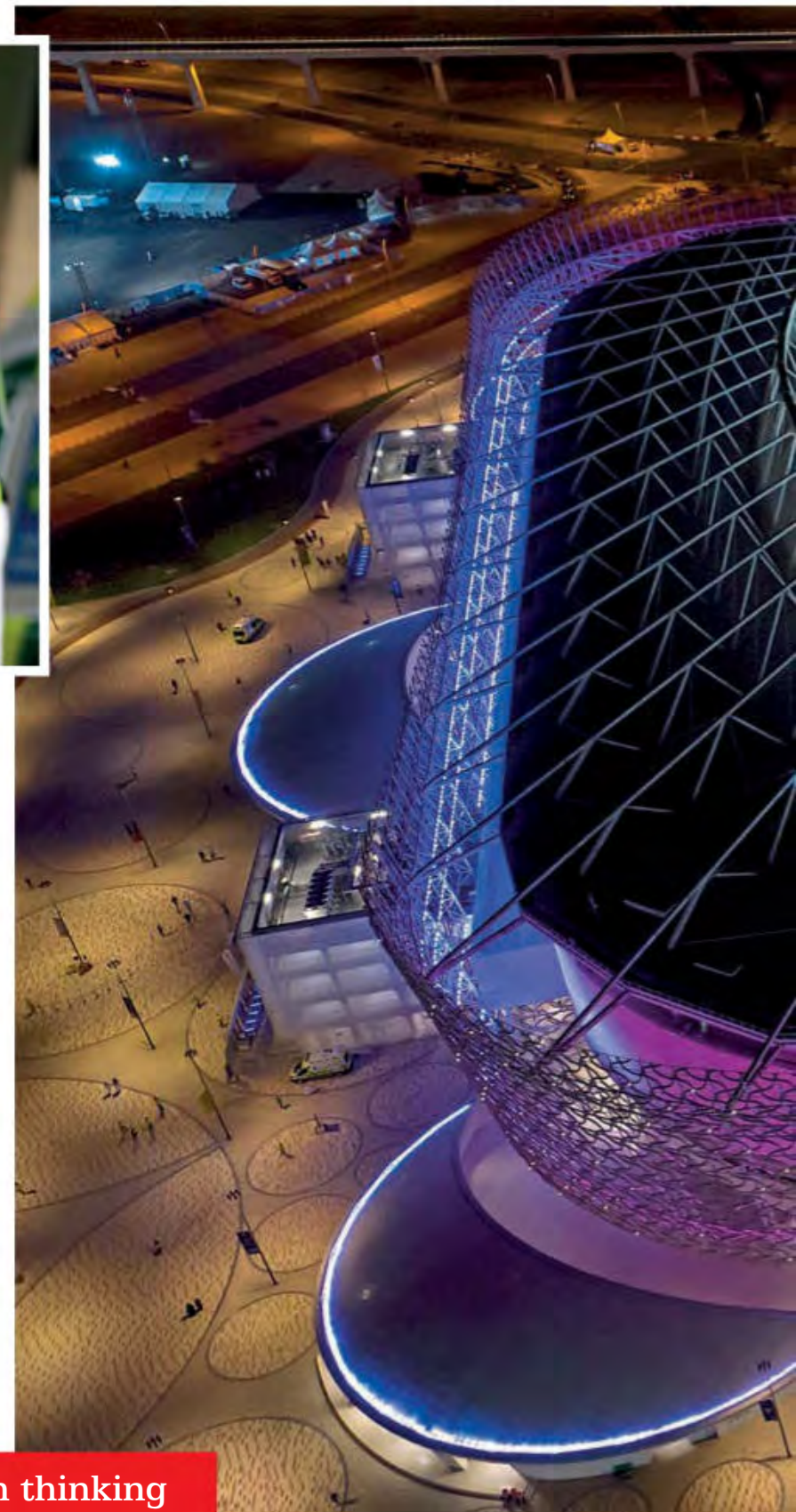
Copa America... Qatar celebrate a goal in their 2-2 draw with Paraguay in the 2019 tournament

Winners...Qatar celebrate winning the 2019 AFC Asian Cup with manager Felix Sanchez Bas

appearance in South America, having competed in 2019 fresh from winning the Asian Cup. Although they finished bottom of their group in Brazil, their performances against Colombia, Argentina and Paraguay were better than results suggested. A second bite of the Copa cherry will be welcome indeed.

If that wasn't enough, there will be – global pandemic permitting of course – games in Europe either side of the trip to South America. And what a group Qatar find themselves in. European champions Portugal will

AFC Champions League...Qatar successfully hosted the tournament at the end of 2020



give the Asians a great taste of what to expect in 2022 against the top teams, but games against Serbia and the Republic of Ireland will be more interesting and the kind of tests that Qatar will need to pass, at least on home soil, if they are to get to the knockout stage in 2022. Azerbaijan and Luxembourg should provide opportunities for a change of approach.

The playing side then is going as well as could be expected, with COVID-19 the biggest threat to the national team getting the necessary action. More attention has been on off-the-field preparations however.

Criticism of Qatar's treatment of migrant workers and the *kafala* sponsorship system – where foreign labourers are tied to one employer – has been constant ever since FIFA made the decision in 2010. While concerns over the safety of workers, especially in regard to the country's stadium building programme remain, in 2020 a new law that allowed workers in the country to change jobs without their employers' permission came after the abolition of the exit permit that was needed to leave Qatar. This led the UN's International Labour Organisation to declare that the *kafala* system had been "effectively dismantled". Human rights groups welcomed the new laws, while cautioning that it would all depend on how rigorously the laws were enforced. Scrutiny will be intense and on-going but it seems that progress is being made.

Then there is the official end of the so-called Qatar Blockade. In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain severed all diplomatic relations and closed their borders with the World Cup hosts. As damaging as this was economically and politically, it led to bad blood in football too, spilling over into the 2019 Asian Cup where Qatar's victory in the UAE-hosted tournament was not well received locally. It also caused problems in the AFC Champions League, where teams from the countries regularly meet. And with a World Cup billed as one for the whole region, it would not have been a good look had Qatar been physically cut off from its three closest neighbours. It means the restoration of relations, symbolised by a public hug between Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Qatar's Emir at the Gulf Cooperation summit in early January led to a sigh of relief all round.

Tens of thousands of fans who had been thinking about some early winter sunshine and lots of football may think again

If you told organisers of Qatar 2022 back in 2017 that there would be all kinds of competitive and exciting tests for the national team, the blockade would be over and the criticism of worker's rights reduced then they would have been delighted. But there is, of course, the problem of COVID-19.

There is enough time before the World Cup kicks off to be reasonably confident that all will be okay in terms of games taking place, though nobody can say for sure. With new variants of the virus springing up, travel may still be an issue. Tens of thousands of fans who had been thinking about some early winter sunshine and lots of football may think again and wonder whether it is worth the effort and the expense. It remains to be seen what state the travel industry is in and with the possibility of games in Europe being postponed over the coming months, 2022's calendar could be extremely hectic even before the World Cup kicks off.

As you would expect, organisers have been sounding a confident note. "We are going to bring people towards celebrating, what I believe, will be the first global event at the tail end of the pandemic," Hassan Al Thawadi, secretary general and chairman of the 2022 World Cup organising committee said, adding that the Olympics and others will provide some lessons. "We are observing and learning from these events and have the luxury of two

Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium...The latest completed stadium was inaugurated in December

years to learn how to host the world in 2022," he said.

In fact, Qatar doesn't have to go far to learn how to deal with COVID. The Gulf nation stepped in to save the 2020 AFC Champions League. The tournament was suspended last March with just one or two group games played. There were few willing hosts ready later in the year but Qatar provided a "bio-secure bubble" and it allowed the group and knockout stages to be finished without too much trouble.

Asian club events are one thing, the World Cup is quite another. Without COVID-19, organisers of the 2022 World Cup would be delighted with where they are at the start of 2021. But with the global pandemic still raging, nobody knows what is going to happen.

Winners...Ulsan Hyundai lifted the 2020 AFC Champions League in the Al Janoub Stadium

eye witness

Oluwashina Okeleji reports

NIGERIA

From a Lagos dumpsite to Africa's most expensive footballer

The extraordinary and unlikely story of Napoli and Nigeria striker Victor Osimhen, told by the people who knew him first

In the summer of 2020, Italian side Napoli paid a club record fee to sign striker Victor Osimhen from Lille. The outlay, which could reach as high as €81 million, would make the Nigeria international the most expensive African player of all time.

It was not always apparent that he would hit those heights. Certainly not when his footballing journey began as a scrawny young boy. At that point in his life, Osimhen had already lost his mother, and was adjusting to the ever-constricting reality of privation in the Olusosun landfill slum in Lagos, after his father lost his job. Survival – by any means necessary – was the watchword, and while being one of seven children meant there was a multiplicity of potential income streams, hawking in the streets was far from ideal for a young boy.

In football, he found his escape. According to Nurudeen Sanni, a neighbour who became something of a mentor figure, Osimhen was born to be a centre-forward.

"I saw the qualities of a striker in him from the age of four. We nicknamed him 'Spicy'," says Sanni, a reference to his capacity to sizzle and sting. "He was small, but he could move with the ball really fast!"

Eventually, football took up more and more of his time. He began to play for community-based club Peric FC, which ground-shared with a local primary school. There his competitive nature really came to the fore.

"He has always hated losing," says childhood friend Chukwuemeka Nonso. "Even when he was playing on the local field, he would complain a lot if his other team-mates were playing poorly. He would verbally confront them occasionally. Because of that attitude, he would get punished a lot by his coach, but that was Victor. He always put above 100 per cent in whatever he was doing."

Friend and mentor... Nurudeen Sanni

His performances would catch the eye of the aptly named Ultimate Strikers Academy. At the academy he worked with coach Chinedu Ogbenna.

"I saw him as a chap who was determined to get to whatever it is he wanted to get to," Ogbenna recalls. "He was always keen to seize opportunities too: once he was in a position of goalscoring, he rarely missed the target.

"Whenever he remembers his upbringing, he wants to work harder. He wasn't necessarily the best player in the team, but because of his drive and determination, he became one of our most important players."

SSCN
OSIMHEN
9
KIMBO

World Cup winner... Osimhen (R) with Golden Ball winner Kelechi Nwakali (L) after winning the Under-17 World Cup in 2015

That determination came with a single-mindedness as well: Osimhen refused to take his A Levels, preferring to forge a path in professional football at any cost, but lied to his family that he had. Only when the results came out, and he was unable to present his, did the ruse become apparent, to the disappointment of the entire family.

The scrawny teenager had burnt his bridges; football simply had to work.

Fortune favours the brave, and so when Nigeria began to put together a squad for the 2015 Under-17 World Cup in Chile, Osimhen attended the open screenings in the nation's capital Abuja. In order to participate, the youngster embarked on a nine-hour inter-state road trip, for the first time in his life, cooped up in a small saloon car as part of a party of six people.

Upon arrival, he would only get a small window to make a first impression. Erstwhile coach of the U17 national team Emmanuel Amuneke is a stern character, and had a large number of prospective candidates to screen, so players were sorted into teams for 30-minute appraisal matches.

It was a shot in the dark that offered few guarantees. In fact, when Osimhen called to inform Sanni that he was attending the screening exercise, his mentor was highly sceptical.

"Physically, he was very small, you know? I did not believe Nigeria would select someone like him for the Under-17s. He called to tell me he was in Abuja and I told him, 'Don't bother, just come back home!'

"But he told me not to worry, that he would try to make the team."

Former Sporting and Barcelona winger Amuneke, himself something of a prodigy during his playing days, recalls the first encounter with the youngster who would go on to lead his country to success.

Chelsea fan...a grainy image of Osimhen in a Chelsea shirt, the club he supported in his youth

"I remember the first time I met Victor Osimhen," Amuneke tells *World Soccer*. "Everybody was given the opportunity to be able to show their quality, but the crowd was so much. We had to organise the team in such a way that it would be easier for us to select players after 15 to 30 minutes' play from each group.

"So, to be very honest with you, when his team was playing, I was on the other side of the pitch, trying to select a new team that would come up immediately after. When his team was done playing, I was not all that convinced. But when my backroom staff came to me, they pointed him out to me. I told them I didn't see much about him, but that I would have a second look. That was

Childhood friend... Chukwuemeka Nonso wearing a Lille shirt, his old friend's former club

how, in the second game, he got another opportunity and he played quite well."

Looking back now, it was an inspired decision.

"You could see the determination in him right away. Of course at that particular time you're not looking at the quality of the players in terms of what they're going to present. You're just looking for intelligence, for decision-making with and without the ball. I think these are the key things that I was mostly emphasising and looking for, and Victor had them. Most importantly, he was coachable, and he was hungry."

Amuneke had identified a diamond in the rough, and immediately set about polishing the young striker. After scraping qualification for the World Cup by finishing fourth in CAF qualifying, "we knew we had to work on our players in terms of our ability to take chances.

"We knew we had good players, but there were other factors that we had to bring on board, from the technical point of view to the tactical aspect of the game, even from the psychological aspect of the game. These players had mostly been picked from academies, and had not been involved in any kind of league structure.

"We looked at Victor as a striker and how we could improve his positioning, his running, his realisation that there are times you only need to touch the ball once, his decision-making in pressing situations. We had to work on all that, and thankfully he was able to adapt and demonstrate at the World Cup the quality in him."

Osimhen positively exploded in Chile, scoring ten goals in seven matches to claim the tournament Golden Boot and Silver Ball. The quality and variety of his finishing proved a real highlight.

> **"He wasn't necessarily the best player in the team, but because of his drive and determination, he became one of our most important players"**
>
> **Osimhen's former coach Chinedu Ogbenna**

"As you watched him at that World Cup, you quickly discovered something about him," Amuneke explained. "As a striker, it is not common to see a tall player like him, and at that age, with very good coordination in terms of his running and contact with the ball. Some tall players are good with their head, but Victor had the full complement of qualities you'd want in a striker."

Despite taking the scenic route through Wolfsburg and Sporting Charleroi, and suffering some misfortune already in his professional career, Osimhen's sheer range has seen him rise to the highest levels of European football regardless.

When, in his sole season with Lille, he scored on his Champions League debut against Chelsea, it marked a special moment for him: he had supported the London club growing up, peeping through holes in the tarp at the local viewing centre in Olusosun to catch a glimpse of Didier Drogba in blue.

Now, he is the one they watch back in his old neighbourhood.

Amuneke has few doubts Osimhen can reach even higher heights, provided he keeps the focus that has taken him this far already.

"Losing his mother at an early age prepared him for what life is like, it toughened him up, it gave him focus. I know he is a player who knows what he wants, and is very mature for his age. He is not afraid of challenges.

"People will always have doubts, but Victor's belief in himself helped when he moved to Wolfsburg. Things didn't work out the way people were expecting, and probably a lot of people might have considered him one of those players at youth level who doesn't fulfil their potential. But he remained calm, and now he's with one of the best teams in Europe.

"If he works hard, remains humble and keeps the right associates, there is no limit to the level he can reach."

Coach...former Nigeria U17 coach Emmanuel Amuneke

eye witness

Samindra Kunti reports

SOUTH SUDAN

Africa's newest international team

Sometimes Ashu Besong simply chuckles. It is all he can do when pondering his problems as coach of South Sudan, the youngest country in the world. At times, he is still confounded by his new environment. South Sudan doesn't have a national stadium and the national training centre in the capital Juba boasts the only professional football field in the whole country.

The "Bright Stars" play their home fixtures in neighbouring Kenya. In November, they triumphed 1-0 against regional heavyweights Uganda, courtesy of a 36th-minute penalty from striker Tito Okello, who plays in Kenya for Gor Mahia. South Sudan protected their lead to record their first three points in the Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers and maintain a slim chance of reaching the finals in Cameroon in 2022.

The result left Besong buoyant. The majority of the team were under 25. South Sudan's population is young.

Pitch invasion...South Sudan fans celebrate after beating Somalia in the African Nations Championship in 2017

Bicycle kick...South Sudan defender Attir Thomas Tom

Infantino...The FIFA president visited South Sudan in 2018

"In the long-term, we have to build a program for the grassroots," says Besong. "There are so many young talents in South Sudan. Each club should have youth teams – Under-12, Under-15 and Under-17. We will need years to develop those talents, to become elite players."

The German-Cameroonian coach arrived in Juba in 2019 to find the team in the lower parts of the FIFA ranking. They participated in the last three Africa Cup of Nations qualification campaigns as well as the preliminaries for the 2018 World Cup, but never made much of an impact. It didn't take Besong long to discover why.

"The clubs have nothing, just a name, a few balls, a few training materials and an open space where they train," recalls Besong. "Most of the games are being played on these grounds. They don't play on grass, not even on artificial pitches. I sometimes go there to scout. Even dogs pass by. It took me a few months to get that into my head."

Al Rabit FC, the current cup winners, participated in the Confederation of African Football (CAF) Confederation Cup, but were eliminated in the qualifiers by Tanzania's Namungo FC. In the local league, Amarat United, Atlabara FC and Kator FC are among the other leading clubs. All 12 clubs in the Juba League play on dust grounds with potholes.

Football development in South Sudan remains slow. The professionalization of the league, nationwide coach education and infrastructure are a priority to cultivate a sporting culture and advance South Sudan's fortunes, but without much funding those objectives remain problematic.

Besong explains: "South Sudan still needs to invest a lot in football, which I don't think is a priority now. The economy, even though they are facing a lot of devaluation of their currency, is at its best. Some of the citizens are returning, some investors are getting in. In other regions, outside of Juba, you still have crimes and attacks from pockets of resistance. The government has other priorities – schools, hospitals, roads. It is going to take a while. The government didn't fund anything, not even one dollar."

Bright Stars...South Sudan celebrate scoring against Somalia

South Sudan Football Association (SSFA) president Francis Amin adds: "I am lobbying the government and trying to convince them that sports need support. I am working hard on that one."

In 2012, South Sudan gained independence, but civil war stymied the implementation of the 2018 South Sudan peace agreement as well as social and economic progress. Sports and football are not a priority in the country and the SSFA is financially dependent on both CAF and FIFA. The African governing body distributes $500,000 per year to the young member association, but that funding was reduced to $300,000 due to lack of women's football activity.

Last December, the SSFA took its first steps to transform the domestic women's game by appointing Jean Sseninde – a former Uganda international who also played for the likes of Crystal Palace and Queens Park Rangers – in a consultancy role to lead the federation's four-year women's football strategy, Stars Unite. In 2019, South Sudan participated in the regional CECAFA Women's Football Championship, but the new strategy will still strongly focus on empowering women to play. It is about breaking barriers, according to Sseninde.

The SSFA has also benefited from FIFA's development programme, receiving over $8 billion since 2016. By comparison, neighbours Sudan have received $5.72bn from the world federation in the last four years. The FIFA funding is helping the construction of a national stadium in Juba at a cost of $5.15 million. The SSFA is also planning to upgrade stadiums in the cities of Wau and Makalal.

Coincidentally, South Sudan was the first African country to support Gianni Infantino's candidacy for FIFA president in 2016. Then-SSFA president Chabur Goc Alei was later banned from all football-related activities for ten years for misappropriation of FIFA development money and bribery.

"Chabur is creating a lot of conflict because he has been suspended for five years," says Amin. "We are trying to learn from that mistake, to correct the federation and put a system in place. All the departments know how the system works: how to use the FIFA money and how to be transparent. We are trying not to repeat the same history again."

Besong knows that internal and external politics are never far away. It is something he picked up as coach of Cameroon's Under-20s, his first role on the continent. Previously, he worked as a coach under Sven-Goran Eriksson at Leicester City.

He tempers sporting expectations as well, even if Amin harbours dreams of becoming a regional power in the short-term.

National coach... Ashu Besong

> "The clubs have nothing, just a name, a few balls, a few training materials and an open space where they train"
>
> **Ashu Besong, national team manager**

Besong doesn't entertain fanciful ideas of possession football. The Bright Stars have their limitations and so it is the playing personnel that dictate tactics. The former Bundesliga player demands organisation and discipline from his team. "I can't say that we, South Sudan, are going to play offensive, stylish football - teams would beat us 10-0 every game," explains Besong. "We have to design a system where we attack and defend compactly. You have to develop local players to be able to play against top professionals coming from Europe and Israel."

Besong, however, can count on the experience and knowhow of players from the diaspora in Australia, where more than 11,000 South Sudanese live. At the start of the Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers, he selected twelve Australia-based players for his 32-man squad. In November, six players from the Australia contingent integrated the squad. "I've got two scouts in Australia," explains Besong. "They always notify me of players. Those players bring that professionalism that helps the local players to learn from them."

Consultant...Jean Sseninde

Besong and the FA are also scouting for players in Norway and Hungary. Every avenue is being explored to improve. The team can still reach the Africa Cup of Nations with two qualification matches remaining in March. Bottom of Group B on three points, South Sudan will play both Burkina Faso and Malawi. Qualification for the finals however is not a must according to Besong, even though it would be a confirmation of South Sudan's pedigree and reminiscent of the triumphs of a united Sudan in the '70s.

"The country and the federation are going in the right direction," concludes Besong. "I am a little bit satisfied. There is a lot we can achieve and do. We need the resources. If you don't put money into football, it will be difficult to achieve anything. When we have those resources, we will be able to compete against other big nations. For now, I am very satisfied. At the youth level, the junior national teams are doing very well. You might see one of the South Sudanese national teams in the youth African Cup of Nations. That would be a very great achievement."

Juba Stadium...The SSFA unveiled plans for a new national stadium on Facebook

AIA

Son SHINES

The Tottenham forward is enjoying the best season of his career, and he's put in the hard yards to get here

Words: Nick Bidwell

Don't be fooled by the broad smile that seems etched upon his face. If the explosive Tottenham and South Korea forward is now established as a Premier League, Europe-wide and Asian sensation, it's mainly through the efforts of his alter ego – the single-minded competitor who has pursued his career dreams with rare tenacity.

Dedication, thy name is Son. Making the grade as an elite player was all he ever wanted from life and on joining the Hamburg SV academy at the age of 16 in 2008 – initially on a Korean federation exchange programme, then on a permanent basis – he was determined not to waste that all-important first stint in Europe. A workaholic in every sense, he treated every day at the HSV youth facility in Ochsenzoll as a God-given opportunity to graft and get ahead. Pure energy, pure obsession.

"While some of the boys [at the academy] played table tennis in the afternoon after training, I'd go back onto the pitch to work on my shooting technique," Son recalled in an interview with the *Hamburger Abendblatt* newspaper. "Some used to advise me to switch off from football from time to time. My answer to that was to secretly carry on training. Football always has been everything to me. I love the game, I breathe it, I dream of it."

Germans generally take great pride in the intensity of purpose they bring to a football pitch. But here was young Son thoroughly outdoing them in the application stakes. "Even when he wasn't supposed to train, he'd join in with the sessions of other groups," HSV academy colleague and friend Alexander Lukesch told German news website *Watson.de*. "He'd be doing push-ups, running laps and went as far as to do extra work on his own. A lot of us were thinking: 'it's already dark', and after two training work-outs, you need to rest. He'd go to bed early, get up at daybreak and train like someone possessed."

It says everything about his desire to make a pro splash that in his five years with HSV (2008-13), Son had little taste for nightlife. His was an existence based almost entirely on the training ground, stadium and home. Nothing else mattered. Not surprisingly for one with his eyes fixed on the prize of a full-time contract, he proved an assiduous absorber of the German language. Thanks to daily lessons from a Berlitz School tutor, he quickly got to grips with the grammar of this most complicated of tongues, topping up his linguistic skills with a heavy schedule of TV programmes, including his favourite cartoon, *SpongeBob SquarePants*.

What Son was essentially doing in those formative years in Hamburg was

Rising star...Son earned his move to Leverkusen after scoring 12 Bundesliga goals in 2012-13

religiously following the life lessons of his father, Son Woong-jung. The latter was no mean footballer himself – good enough to play for top South Korean outfit Ilhwa Chunma and the country's Under-23s, before a nasty Achilles injury ended his career at just 28 – and set about drumming home the message that success in soccer could not be achieved on a wing and a prayer, that it was a difficult and exhausting industry which required absolute commitment.

His father, all homespun philosophy and authoritarian granite, not only drilled his two sons (Heung-min and the older Heung-yun) individually; he also coached Son's school team, devising a training programme as unique as it was demanding. For two hours every day, the regime was the same: incessant ball-juggling, learning how to control the sphere with every part of the body and intricate dribbling drills. It was basic, it could be cruel and cocking a snook at usual youth development ideas, Son Woong-jung would not even allow his boys to play in organised matches. Only at the age of 14 was Heung-min given the green light to do so.

Tough love was very much the long and short of this football education. Son has since admitted that his father never praised him, only communicating in rebukes and reproaches. Son stuck with the programme nevertheless. He still loved football and looked up to his dad. He had no wish to offend him.

Son Woong-jung, now running a football academy in the family's hometown of Chuncheon in the northern province of Gangwon, was wont to overdo the master and slave scenario. Following an altercation between his two sons, his father punished them by ordering to play keepy-uppy for four hours straight. Somehow, defying gravity and fatigue, they complied. On another occasion the grandmother of a neighbour, aghast at the sight of more paternal heavy-handedness, threatened to call the police.

When Son scored on his Bundesliga debut for Hamburg in a 3-2 win in Koln in October 2010 – a cheeky effort in which he clipped the ball over the

Breakthrough...Son made his name at Hamburg

Rising star... Son earned his move to Leverkusen after scoring 12 Bundesliga goals in 2012-13

Homecoming...Son takes on FC Seoul on a pre-season tour, the club he played for as a youngster

onrushing keeper before coolly converting – his father's reaction was typical of the uncompromising taskmaster. No back-slapping or hearty congratulations, just a list of "could do better" items and a requisition order for the youngster's laptop. Apparently he did not want Son to run the risk of growing complacent on a diet of rave reviews. Contrast his dad's glacial reaction to that of HSV boss Armin Veh: "At 18, Son can do things which other professionals cannot pull off at 30."

No one can say, though, that Son Woong-jung solely wielded the big stick. Here was a man who was so concerned with the safety of his pupils that he would pick up stones from the field prior to every training session and regularly made the long trip to Hamburg to visit his son. The work ethic and carpe diem mentality he instilled in his son has left the 28-year-old Tottenham winger or striker with a golden legacy.

Equally crucial was Son Woong-jung's insistence on exemplary ball-skills. Perfectly two-footed, Son's technical mastery is there for all to see. Little wonder he is so versatile, able to exploit his pace and tricks anywhere along the front-line. His dad, it is claimed, based his finesse-first approach on the belief that a certain lack of razzle-dazzle held him back in his own career.

> "Some used to advise me to switch off from football from time to time. My answer to that was to secretly carry on training"

Son is well aware of the huge debt he owes his father: "Without him, I wouldn't be here," declared Sonny in the *London Evening Standard* in 2018. "He gave me my attitude, helped me with so many things."

Simultaneously guru, promoter, agent and severest critic, Son's father unquestionably deserves plenty of credit for the Asian superstar story that has unfolded. However, he was not the only one to plot the world-beating course. Others played a significant part too, not least agent Thies Bliemeister and Hamburg youth coach Soner Uysal, who first spotted Son – then an Under-15 international – on a scouting tour of South Korean academies in 2008. Uysal says he was immediately struck by Son's game awareness and intelligence. Bliemeister was so enamoured with the youngster that he became his representative, a position he still holds today.

Son himself is full of praise for the care and attention that coaches at Hamburg lavished upon him. And

Timeline

JUL 8, 2010

Signs his first professional contract at Hamburg after impressing in pre-season.

OCT 30, 2010

Scores his first league goal for Hamburg to become the club's youngest-ever Bundesliga goalscorer.

ABOVE: Title challengers... Son scored twice in Spurs' 6-1 demolition of Manchester United at Old Trafford

Deadly duo...Kane and Son have been a lethal combination this season

nobody helped him as much as HSV assistant coach/head coach Michael Oenning, who worked ceaselessly at ironing out the wrinkles in the youngster's play, and improving his tactical nous. Oenning says the Korean was always a special talent, happy to point out that even on Son's first day of training with the professionals in the summer of 2010, the then 17-year-old was a sheer showstopper.

"I told him, in the first instance, to look to play in striker Ruud van Nistelrooy," revealed Oenning in conversation with Hamburg sports reporter Kai Schiller. Oenning need not have bothered. Minutes later, Son gained possession, took on and beat a string of defenders and slotted home. "He straight away realised he'd gone against my orders. Instead of a little celebration, he put his hands to his head and ran over to apologise to Van Nistelrooy." Bashful and repentant: classic Son.

Despite scoring no fewer than nine goals in that pre-season – including one in a friendly against Chelsea – his first-team breakthrough would have to be put on ice. Late in the Chelsea game, he broke his foot, forcing him to the sidelines for a couple of months.

Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino would prove to be another key mentor. Acquired from Bayer Leverkusen for £22 million in 2015, Son found the going tough in his first season in the Premier League – a starter in only 13 games and accumulating just four goals. He was sufficiently frustrated to contemplate calling it quits, only for Pochettino to persuade him to knuckle down and fight for his place. Wise counsel indeed. The following campaign he was considerably more productive (34 competitive starts and 21 goals) and

DEC 30, 2010

Makes his debut for South Korea in a friendly against Syria ahead of the 2011 AFC Asian Cup.

JUN 13, 2013

Signs for Bayer Leverkusen for a reported fee of €10 million, the highest transfer fee in the club's history at the time.

AUG 25, 2015

Joins Tottenham for £22m to become the most expensive Asian player in football history.

SEP 13, 2015

Makes his Tottenham debut in a 1-0 Premier League win against Sunderland, before being subbed off in the second half.

has been an automatic choice ever since, carving out a niche for himself as one of the most effective forwards in the country. His achievements for Spurs speak for themselves: a starring role as the club came runners-up in the 2018-19 Champions League and 100 goals in all competitions.

Central to Son's form in North London has been his partnership with Harry Kane, particularly this season. In the Premier League era, no duo has combined to score more often in one season. The previous record of 13 – held by Chris Sutton and Alan Shearer for Blackburn Rovers in 1994-95 – was matched after just 16 matches. That goal – a cross by Kane turned in by Son at home to Leeds – took them to a grand total of 32 goal combinations, four short of the all-time record held by Frank Lampard and Didier Drogba. The former Chelsea heroes are unlikely to hold that particular record for long.

Central to Son's form in North London has been his partnership with Harry Kane

As well as dovetailing effectively with Kane, Son was also regularly used as a replacement for the frequently injured England front man by Pochettino. The ex-Spurs boss knew he could always rely on the Korean's great movement and powers of penetration to lead the line. Over the years, he became one of the Argentine's most trusted lieutenants, personifying his energetic style of football better than anybody.

As for Son, he could rest assured that Pochettino was in his corner. The perfect example came in 2018, when South Korea put in a request for Son to take part in the Asian Games in Indonesia. Spurs were not legally obliged to release him, and with Kane out injured at the time, had even more reason to confine him to Premier League duties. But aware how much the competition meant to Sonny personally – the South Korean authorities had promised the squad military service exemption if they struck gold – Pochettino successfully fought for the player's wishes to be respected. Suitably motivated to pull out all the stops, Son and company duly brought home the no-barracks bacon, beating Japan 2-1 in the final.

In South Korean representative circles many coaches have enabled his rise. Cho Kwang-rae, once one of the country's best-ever midfielders, handed him the first of his 89 full caps in a friendly victory over Syria in December 2010. Son also learned a great deal under the wing of Hong Myung-bo, a classy former national team sweeper who played in no fewer than four World Cup finals. Early on in his time with the Taeguk Warriors, Son struggled to translate his impressive form with

Goal of the Season... Son's solo effort v Burnley in 2019-20 was voted the campaign's best strike

New manager bounce...Jose Mourinho has helped get the best out of Son

SEP 17, 2015
Scores his first two goals for Spurs, in a 3-1 home win against Qarabag FK in the Europa League.

OCT 14, 2016
Wins the Premier League Player of the Month Award for September, becoming the first Asian player to receive the award.

NOV 5, 2017
Scores against Crystal Palace to overtake Park Ji-sung as the Premier League's top-scoring Asian player.

JUN 27, 2018
Scores South Korea's second goal in a 2-0 victory over world champions Germany at the 2018 World Cup.

JUL 20, 2018
Commits his future to Spurs by extending his contract at the club until 2023.

World Cup...Son scores into an empty net against Germany in 2018

Hamburg to the international stage. But with Hong calling the shots, he visibly grew in assurance, very much at the fore of World Cup 2014 warm-up victories over Switzerland and Greece and establishing himself as one of the side's go-to players. Another milestone was passed in 2018 when Shin Tae-jong gave him the captaincy for the first time.

Unfortunately for Son, the two World Cups he has featured in have only brought heartache. In Brazil in 2014, the South Koreans failed to win a single game in the group phase and deservedly were sent packing. For Son, whose sole highlight that summer was a goal in a 4-2 defeat to Algeria, early elimination was just too much to handle, breaking down in tears at the end of his side's 1-0 defeat to Belgium and having to be comforted by a fatherly Hong.

Four years on, at the World Cup in Russia, he and his fellow countrymen once again failed to clear the first round hurdle, though at least he had the satisfaction of scoring in the 2-0 giant-killing of holders Germany.

Like most professionals, he has had to grin and bear his bad times too. His three Premier League red cards in 2019 damaged his reputation somewhat. So did his controversial departure from Leverkusen in August 2015. After netting 29 goals in two seasons at the BayArena and contributing to a pair of high-end Bundesliga finishes (fourth on both occasions), he could not have been more popular in this part of the Rhineland. However all was to turn sour early in the 2015-16 campaign, with Son effectively forcing his way out on the eve of a Champions League qualification play-off second-leg against Lazio. Leverkusen did not appreciate the timing of his exodus or the fact that he slipped out the back door without a goodbye. Cue plenty of vitriol, most of it aimed in the direction of Son senior and his "bad advice".

> Unfortunately for Son, the two World Cups he has featured in have only brought heartache

Yet for Son, it was too good an opportunity to miss. Playing in the Premier League had always been his number one career objective. This was his moment and he sprinted flat out in order to seize it.

Devastated...South Korea's defeat to Belgium in 2014 left Son in tears

Soldier Son...Last year Son completed his reduced National Service

Representing his country has not exactly been a bed of roses either. In the autumn of 2011, his father sparked a storm by suggesting that Son's national team appearances should be rationed, that he should only be called upon "when they really need him".

Eyebrows were similarly raised when he opted out of the 2012 Olympic tournament, ostensibly to concentrate on his career in Germany. Four years later, in Rio, he came in for more Olympic criticism after South Korea were beaten at the the quarter-final stage by Honduras in a surprising 1-0 defeat.

South Korea's German coach Uli Stielike certainly was not a fan, enraged when Son twice reacted badly to being substituted in games in 2016 against Spain and China, kicking a water bottle, then throwing a towel in the direction of the bench. "His behaviour off the pitch could be problematic," declared Stielike. "Lots of spectators and TV viewers will have seen this. I have to think of the entire team. Every player has to careful."

It just goes to show: even someone as naturally level-headed as Son can, on occasion, fall prey to the red mist. Heroes have their frailties too.

JUN 1, 2019
Plays all 90 minutes as Tottenham are beaten 2-0 by Liverpool in the Champions League final in Madrid.

OCT 21, 2019
Named in the 30-man shortlist for the 2019 Ballon d'Or.

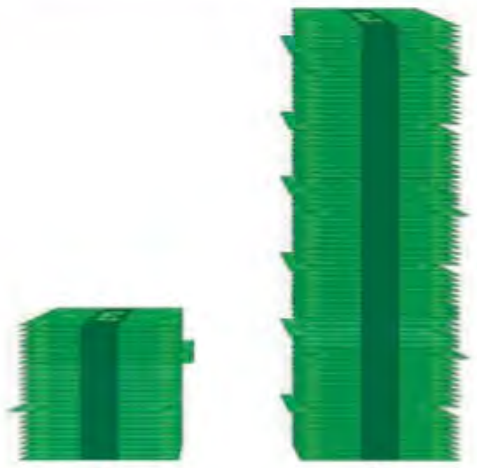
DEC 17, 2020
Wins The 2020 Puskas Award for his wondergoal against Burnley in the 2019-20 Premier League season.

JAN 2, 2021
Scores his 100th goal for Spurs in a 3-0 win against Leeds United.

Son Heung-Min

the numbers game

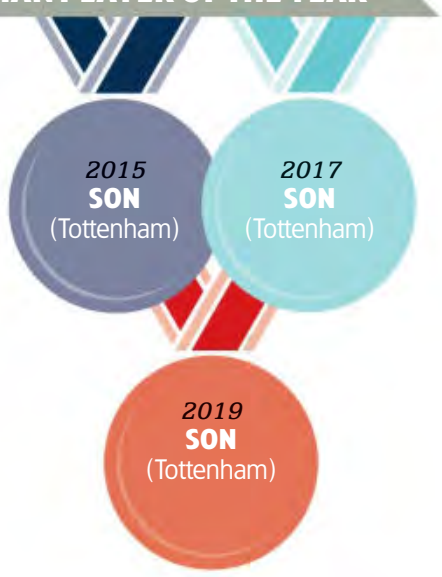
TRANSFER FEES



€10m
Hamburg to Leverkusen (2013)

€30m
Leverkusen to Tottenham (2015)

AFC ASIAN PLAYER OF THE YEAR



SOUTH KOREA

89
CAPS

26
GOALS

TOP ASIAN PREMIER LEAGUE GOALSCORERS

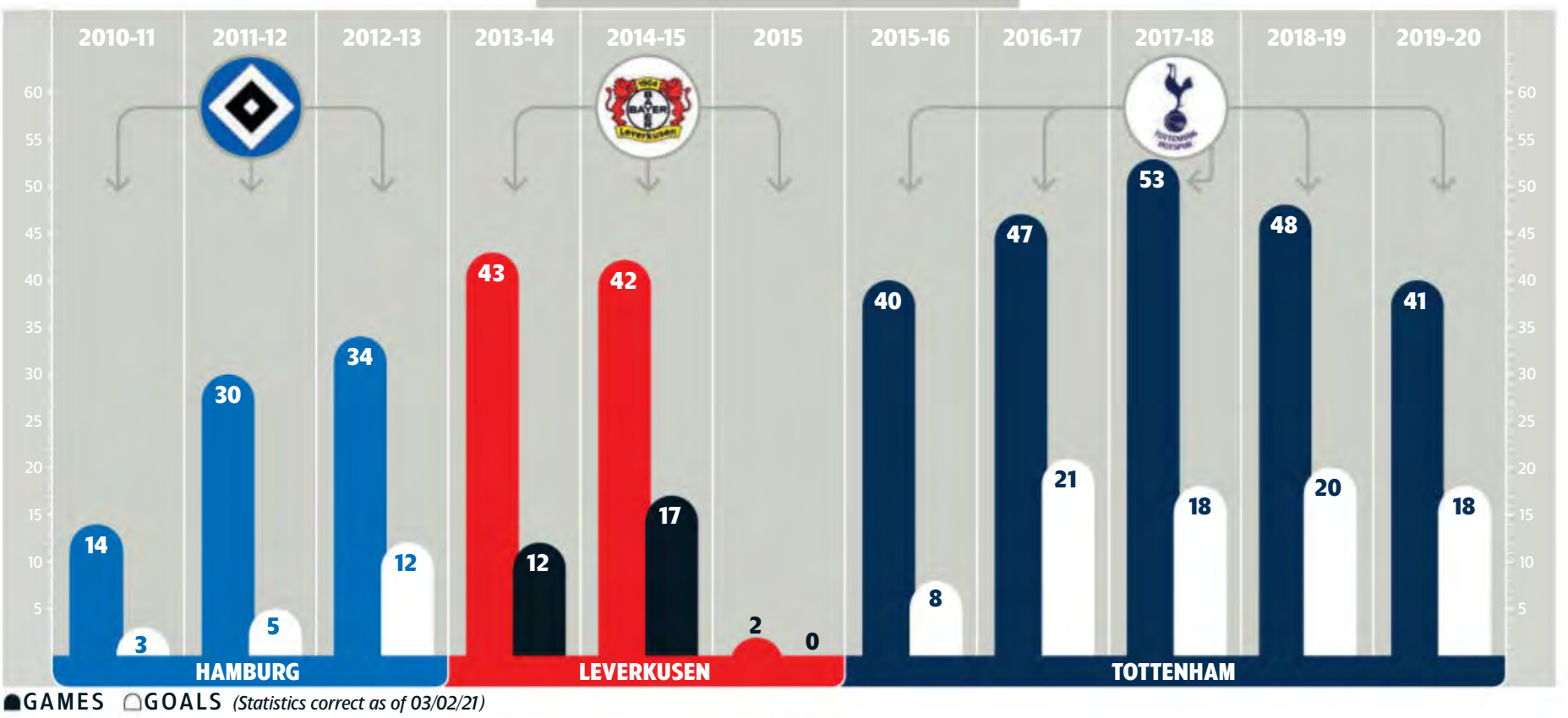
Player	Goals
Son Heung-Min	65
Park Ji-Sung	19
Ki Sung-Yueng	15
Shinji Okazaki	14
Lee Chung-Yong	8

GOALS 2019-20

18

Goals in 2019-20 saw him pick up Tottenham's Player of the Season award for the second consecutive year

TOTTENHAM GOAL OF THE SEASON



GAMES GOALS *(Statistics correct as of 03/02/21)*

Question time

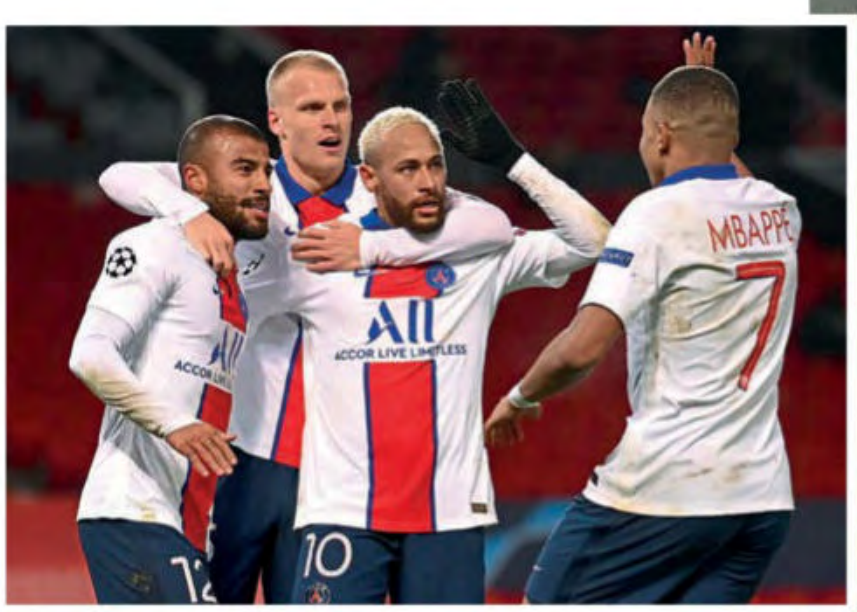
PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

WHAT IS MAURICIO POCHETTINO'S TOP PRIORITY?

Above all, the former Spurs boss will be looking to give the Parisians a durable, well-defined playing style, something which his predecessor generally failed to implement in his two and a half years in charge. For all PSG's success last season – a domestic Treble plus a Champions League final – they tended to be football chameleons, changing shape, organisation and philosophy from week to week. More often than not, it seemed that the Tuchel project was a trial by error treadmill.

Pochettino, who played in central defence for PSG between 2001 and 2003, quickly needs to come up with a solid collective system that does not solely rely on the brilliance of attacking superstars Neymar and Kylian Mbappe. In a mission statement on the club's website, Pochettino promised to play "combative, attacking football".

Secondly, Pochettino must assert his authority. Compared to a relatively serene dressing-room at Tottenham,



In-form...PSG finish top of their group

PSG are awash with big egos. The new coach will have to be on his toes to maintain order, unity and focus. One of Tuchel's most significant mistakes was to cede too much latitude to the team's senators, more or less allowing them to manage themselves. Pochettino is unlikely to be so laissez-faire. Tellingly, he laid down the law in his first PSG training session, informing his new charges that he wanted less noise and more application: "Stop talking guys. This is a training session."

Ultimately, much will depend on the sort of relationship he builds with main man Neymar, who as well as being a match-winner par excellence, also has a flair for fomenting trouble with his capricious excesses.

PSG are awash with big egos. The new coach will have to be on his toes to maintain order, unity and focus

Fitness and conditioning is another problem area. Towards the end of last year, the Parisians appeared out on their feet, while it is common knowledge that the doctors at PSG are more than a little worried about Mbappe's current tendency for muscular ailments, so much so that they warned Tuchel against starting him too often. A remedy also needs to be found for the repeated

injury absences of deep-lying Italian playmaker Marco Verratti, a long-time sufferer of groin inflammation. A fit and firing Verratti, both a visionary passer and dogged ball-winner, would certainly help enormously. Word has it that Pochettino believes the Italian is carrying too much timber and wants him to go on a diet.

It's vital for Pochettino to have a squad capable of firing on all cylinders. His preferred style of play, one based on intensity and directness, is not possible without a full tank of gas.

Making his mark... Pochettino's man-management will be put to the test in Paris

ATALANTA

WILL THE *NERAZZURRI* MAINTAIN THEIR AWAY DAY MAGIC?

Whether in Serie A or in Europe, the team so astutely built by coach Gian Piero Gasperini are more dangerous when playing outside Bergamasco, winning all three of their away games in Group D. Take their match-ups with Liverpool in November: hammered 5-0 at home by the Reds, they returned to Anfield to snatch a shock 2-0 win.

Anfield upset...Ilicic opens the scoring

ATLETICO MADRID

WHO IS THE MOST-IMPROVED PLAYER IN THE ATLETI RANKS?

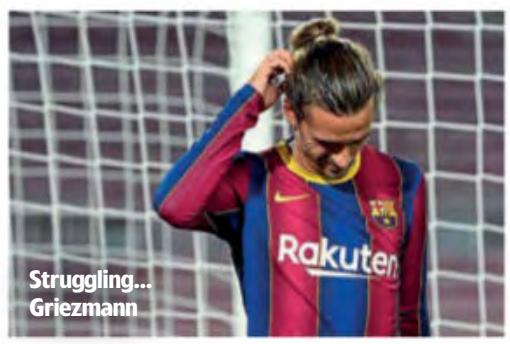
After a horrendous time for the *Colchoneros* last season – failing to register a single goal or assist in any competition – the France winger Thomas Lemar has bounced back with a vengeance this term. "He's worked very hard to show us what he really can do," says Atletico coach Diego Simeone.

Improving...Lemar

BARCELONA

IS ANTOINE GRIEZMANN STARTING TO SHOW HIS WORTH?

At the turn of the year, it seemed the France forward was at the point of no return, with goals in short supply and Martin Braithwaite ahead of him in the pecking order. Yet in recent weeks he has produced a string of match-winning performances. A Messi-less future may not be so bleak if this form continues.



Struggling... Griezmann

BAYERN MUNICH

ARE THE HOLDERS VULNERABLE?

Frequently this season, Bayern have been guilty of not being switched on from the kick-off, making a habit of conceding early goals and forced to fight like crazy to pull themselves out of a tail-spin. Between November and the start of January, Bayern went behind in eight consecutive Bundesliga games, and also in two Champions League group games (a 6-2 win at Salzburg and 1-1 draw away to Atletico Madrid). In every one of those ten matches, Bayern roared back to achieve either a share of the spoils or a win, but sooner or later, such sloppiness will cost them dear. Their lethargy out of the traps is simply asking for trouble, and in a campaign with games coming thick and fast, it's hardly the best way to conserve energy. Bayern have to learn to play more efficiently.

"At the moment we always seem to need a wake-up call before really getting down to business" says Bayern winger Leroy Sane. "We have to be on it from the first minute."

Defensively, the Bavarians have hardly been watertight, conceding 25 goals in their first 17 league games – the worst record of any of the Bundesliga's top four at the midway point. Without the outstanding Manuel Neuer, they would have let in considerably more. Of particular concern to coach Hansi Flick is the poor form of centre-back Jerome Boating and right-back Benjamin Pavard. In the 5-2 victory over Mainz, the pair were hauled off at the break. Boateng and Pavard may find it hard to get back in the good books of Flick.

Complacency?

World player of the year...Lewandowski

> **"At the moment we always seem to need a wake-up call before really getting down to business"**
> Leroy Sane

Lack of motivation? Or just saving themselves for the big European nights?

Whatever the reasons, Flick was not a happy man: "In the first half against Mainz, our defensive display was not worthy of a top team. We were careless in duels and allowed the opposition too many scoring opportunities."

After rubbing up Pep Guardiola the wrong way at Manchester City, new Bayern winger Leroy Sane sadly appears to be having the same effect on Flick. While a wonderful attacking talent, pacy, penetrative and full of craft, Sane can be terribly inconsistent and

Struggling...Sane

has not been starting regularly in Bavaria. Flick wants the German international to track back more, and made an example of him in the 2-1 win at Leverkusen just before Christmas, bringing him on as first-half substitute for the injured Kingsley Coman, then pulling him 30 minutes later.

Tough times for Sane. Either he works harder off the ball, or sits on bench. Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge laid it on the line: "God gave him unbelievable talent, but he has yet to show he has the Bayern DNA. He has to work on this. It's his duty."

BORUSSIA MONCHENGLADBACH

WILL DORTMUND SPECULATION BE A DISTRACTION FOR MARCO ROSE?

Most unlikely. The ex-Salzburg boss is a pro from head to toe and not the sort to let his mind wander. He says he is happy as Gladbach's head coach and has 18 months left on his deal. "I don't really care about this," he says. "I don't deal with rumours or comment on them." Edin Terzic is in caretaker charge of Dortmund until the summer.

In demand... Rose

CHELSEA

CAN THOMAS TUCHEL GET THE BEST OUT OF TIMO WERNER?

Although Werner scored three times in the group stage, all three came from the penalty spot, with Frank Lampard mainly deploying the German from the left. Tuchel is likely to try something different. At Leipzig, the striker came into his own when given a free role, starting through the middle but also dropping deep and drifting wide.

On the wing... Werner

DORTMUND

WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE EDIN TERZIC REPLACED LUCIEN FAVRE?

Caretaker Terzic has binned Favre's 3-4-2-1 shape, preferring to use a 4-2-3-1. Terzic, very much in the Klopp mould, wants to see the team play with more power and aggression. The team are pressing higher and with more intensity than they did under Favre, and Jadon Sancho's form has improved too.

Caretaker...Terzic

REAL MADRID

CAN THEY BREAK OUT OF THEIR INJURY HOODOO?

Fans of *Los Blancos* would be wise to keep their fingers crossed. Since the start of the season, almost three quarters of Real's squad have missed at least one match because of injury or a positive COVID test. Who would have imagined that one of the world's biggest clubs would face such a personnel predicament?

These are the cards that Zinedine Zidane has been dealt, struggling to bring any sort of continuity to team selection. Under huge pressure to keep the show on the road, Zizou has had to continually shuffle his pack, playing mix and match. In Europe, the use of square pegs in round holes has been the norm this term: right-winger Lucas Vazquez filling in at right-back, reserve centre-back Nacho in an emergency role, Mariano Diaz and Luka Jovic trying and failing to make up for the absence of top scorer Karim Benzema.

Eden Hazard – of whom so much was expected when he arrived from Chelsea in the summer of 2019 for a cool €100m – started just twice in the group stage and has been plagued by injury and illness. Inspirational skipper Sergio Ramos was also badly missed on the continental front, unavailable for half of the group games through knee and hamstring injuries.

No wonder Real made such heavy weather of qualifying for the last 16, securing their place with a victory over Borussia Monchengladbach on matchday six.

Peculiarly, certain critics have accused Zidane of excessive line-up rotation. His response is that it's the only way to avoid even more injuries.

Real's packed treatment room has shone a particularly bright light on a squad that lacks strength in depth. Back in the summer, Zidane was reported to have identified four areas of the side that needed extra manpower: attacking reinforcements, a box-to-box midfielder, a full-back and a centre-back. Much to his frustration, none of his wishes were fulfilled. Indeed, not one new buy came through the door, let alone a big-money headliner.

The harsh truth is that Real, like the vast majority of clubs in these times of the pandemic, are feeling the pinch. They have had to take a substantial economic hit. Last season, income was €715m. This term, that is expected to drop by €107m. For the current campaign, their budget has shrunk from €917m to €617m. Players, coaches and executives have suffered a salary cut of ten per cent. "This is a moment for austerity and solidarity," declared club president Florentino Perez at a meeting of club members late last year.

Who would have imagined that one of the world's biggest clubs would face such a personnel predicament?

Zidane, the architect of three straight Champions League triumphs with the Galacticos in 2016, 2017 and 2018, faces the most problematic of tasks: continuing to win with less resources.

Under the circumstances, adding a fourth would be his finest achievement.

Injury-prone... Hazard

Selection headaches...Zidane

LAZIO

WHAT IS GIVING COACH SIMONE INZAGHI SLEEPLESS NIGHTS?

With Lazio's Serie A title hopes all but over, Inzaghi has been infuriated of late by his team's inconsistency and lapses in concentration. He calls the latter "blackouts" and feels it cost the *Biancocelesti* points in a loss to Milan and home draw with Genoa. He insists they must improve their defending at set-pieces to get back on track in 2021.

Lazio goal machine... Ciro Immobile

LIVERPOOL

COULD THE REDS' POOR AWAY FORM BE THEIR ACHILLES HEEL?

For the most part this season, Jurgen Klopp's team have flattered to deceive on the road, rarely performing with their usual zest, zing and bravura. Their five-star front-three of Mo Salah, Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino have often been remarkably ineffectual away from Anfield. Is fatigue a factor?

Upset...Liverpool were held to a draw in Midtjylland

MANCHESTER CITY

DO CITY HAVE A DEFENCE WORTHY OF A CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TROPHY?

Goals have never been a problem for Pep's side, but now he has a defence to challenge for Europe's biggest prize too. England centre-back John Stones has improved immensely this season, playing a key role in the Premier League's tightest defence, alongside Portuguese stopper Ruben Dias, who has settled in exellently since arriving from Benfica.

Solid pairing... Stones and Dias

JUVENTUS

HOW VITAL IS THEIR FRONT-LINE COMBO OF CRISTIANO RONALDO AND ALVARO MORATA?

It's no exaggeration to say that the European ambitions of the *Bianconeri* will live or die according to the production levels of this outstanding Portuguese-Spanish duo. In the group phase the pair were responsible for ten of the team's haul of 14 goals – Morata netting six and CR7 delivering four – and if their round of 16 opponents Porto do not get a handle on them, it will be *arrivederci,* Dragons.

Morata, who joined Juve from Atletico Madrid last summer on a single-season loan deal, allegedly had a strained relationship with Ronaldo when they were team-mates at Real Madrid a few years ago. However there seems to be no friction now. They are feeding off one another, combining with intelligence and mobility, and not fighting for the same balls. Morata tends to attack the near-post, while Ronaldo ghosts in on the far side. They simply work splendidly together, Morata's preference for deep runs, perfectly complementing the Ronaldo's scattergun, move-where-I-please instincts.

"Morata has turned out to be the ideal twin for Ronaldo," recently wrote journalist Antonio Barilla in Turin's *La Stampa* newspaper. "They are fundamental to Juve." They most certainly are. The numbers speak volumes. Ronaldo has provided 40 per cent of Juventus' goals this term. Morata, for his part, has proved equally valuable, notching 11 goals and seven assists in all competitions by mid-January. With the pair in tandem, Juventus normally prevail.

Crucially both men have an excellent Champions League pedigree. Ronaldo, of course, is the all-time leading marksman in the Champions League (with 134 goals) and has won the competition on five occasions with Manchester United and Real Madrid. Morata has two winners' medals (both with Real Madrid) and came very close to making it a hat-trick in a previous stint with Juventus in 2014-15,

First season...Andrea Pirlo

contributing four strikes on the march to the final, then adding a fifth in the 3-1 defeat to Barcelona.

Deadly duo...Morata and Ronaldo

> "Morata has turned out to be the ideal twin for Ronaldo. They are fundamental to Juve"
> Journalist Antonio Barilla

Amazing to think that most pundits and fans could not see the point when Morata signed on for a second spell at Juve in September. Juventus had been linked with swoops for Roma's Edin Dzeko and Uruguayan predator Luis Suarez and the arrival of Morata was very much regarded as a sub-standard alternative. Those critics have since had to eat much humble pie.

PORTO

WHO IS THE DRAGONS' MOST UNDERRATED PLAYER?

Perhaps Argentine keeper Agustin Marchesin, who pulled off a string of brilliant saves in the goalless group phase draw versus Manchester City in December. Another is young Nigeria left-back Zaidu Sanusi. Incredibly, he was playing in Portugal's amateur league just two years ago.

Shot-stopper... Marchesin

RB LEIPZIG

IS IT FAIR TO CATEGORISE LEIPZIG AS A "PLASTIC CLUB"?

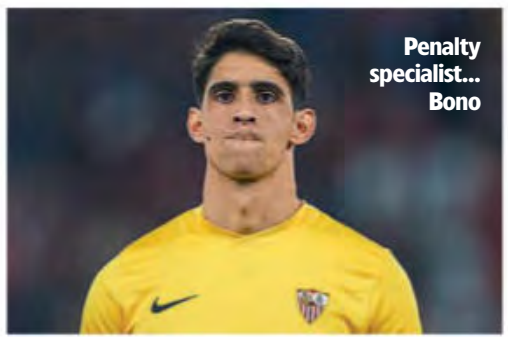
In some ways, yes. In others, no. It's worth remembering that they still feature seven pros – keeper Peter Gulacsi, defenders Lukas Klostermann, Marcel Halstenberg and Willi Orban, midfielders Marcel Sabitzer and Emil Forsberg and striker Yussuf Poulsen – who were playing for them in the German second division in 2015. Evolution not revolution.

Stalwart... Poulsen

SEVILLA

A PIECE OF ADVICE FOR OPPONENTS DORTMUND?

Try not to let the tie go to penalties. Sevilla keeper Bono is a specialist at saving spot-kicks. The Canada-born Moroccan international saved an effort from Raul Jimenez in a Europa League quarter-final last season and recently repeated the trick in a 1-1 draw with Betis in the Seville derby.


Penalty specialist... Bono

Ones to watch

Nick Bidwell selects the players to watch out for in the last 32

Yusuf Yazici

LILLE

The Turkish attacking midfielder will never forget November 5, 2020, the evening when he pulled off what could be a career-defining feat: a hat-trick in Lille's shock 3-0 win in the San Siro against Milan. In 65 years of continental cut and thrust, Milan had never previously lost by a wider margin and all because of the artistry and marksmanship of the 23-year-old Turkey international, the first away player to notch a treble against the *Rossoneri* since Rivaldo for Barcelona in a Champions League fixture in 2000.

"When you score three in one game, it's an indicator that you were exceptionally good," said a beaming Lille coach Christophe Galtier. "He appears to adore this competition. He has a different profile to all the other players in the team. He adds something unique to our game: his powerful shooting, clairvoyance and great left foot."

Hat-trick hero...Yazici celebrates scoring in the San Siro

Amazingly, his stellar efforts in Milan were not his only hat-trick in this season's Europa League. A month earlier, he had the net bulging three times in a 4-1 away victory over Slavia Prague. Half a dozen strikes in 180 minutes: not bad for a player who has suffered his share of hard times at Lille and has spent much of this term on the bench.

Last season, his first in the north of France following a €17.5 million switch from hometown club Trabzonspor was, to be blunt, an unmitigated disaster. Early in the campaign, he struggled to adjust to the physicality and higher rhythm of the French game. Bit by bit, his confidence and touch deserted him and even when he did show signs of finding his feet – performing ably in autumnal clashes with Bordeaux and Marseille – he would be derailed again in December, snapping cruciate ligaments during a Ligue 1 encounter in Monaco and sent to the sidelines for six months.

"We're all very happy for Yus at the moment," declared Lille skipper Jose Fonte in the wake of the victory in Milan. "He's been through a difficult period. After his awful injury, he's had to grit his teeth to bounce back strongly. The Europa League has been his prize. This is for him."

> "He appears to adore this competition"
>
> Lille coach Christophe Galtier

Lille can only be delighted that their heavy investment in him – he is their fourth-most expensive signing of all-time behind Victor Osimhen (now with Napoli) and current team-mates Jonathan David and Renato Sanches – is finally bearing fruit. Especially as Lille general manager Luis Campos, one of the best talent-spotters in the business, had to trail him for at least three years before finally persuading him to quit Trabzonspor and take the plunge in the French top flight. Turkish pros very rarely express a desire to try their luck in the major European leagues. Lille, however, have three in Yazici, full-back Mehmet Zeki Celik and veteran centre-forward Burak Yilmaz.

Yazici has recently recovered from a positive test for coronavirus, and should be available for the round of 32 clash with Ajax.

Leicester reject... Kramaric

ENOCK MWEPU
RED BULL SALZBURG

The talented 23-year-old midfielder from Zambia is highly underrated. His solid positional play, good use of the ball and versatility are an undoubted plus for Salzburg, but he is more than good enough to operate in a stronger league.

HIRVING LOZANO
NAPOLI

Last season, his first in Naples following a move from PSV, the Mexico winger appeared shorn of all will and fizz. This term, he has turned it around, matching 2019-20's goal output by mid-October. Consistently decisive, and particularly excellent when working off a sole striker.

LIOR REFAELOV
ROYAL ANTWERP

The attacking midfielder enjoyed one of the moments of his career in October when he scored the winner in the group phase victory over Tottenham. The Israeli has performed at a high level in Belgium for a decade – first with Club Brugge, before joining Antwerp in 2018.

ABDALLAH SIMA
SLAVIA PRAGUE

The Senegalese teen is a natural finisher, equally comfortable as a winger or leading the line through the middle. Ten goals before Christmas caught the attention of several Premier League clubs, with Slavia warding off the interest by slapping a €50m price tag on him.

Wonderkid...Sima

ANDREJ KRAMARIC
HOFFENHEIM

Once a Leicester City flop, the Croatian striker has rediscovered his mojo at Hoffenheim. One of the Bundesliga's most impressive players, with Bayern Munich rumoured to be watching.

REMY CABELLA
KRASNODAR

A former France international with four caps in 2014, he has made a good recovery since damaging cruciate ligaments in 2019. An inventive playmaker, he makes his side tick.

GALENO
BRAGA

The 23-year-old has been a star for Braga this season with his creativity, incisiveness and goals. A huge talent who slipped through the net of all the top Brazilian clubs, and somehow failed to make the grade at Porto.

Winger...Lozano

DEJAN JOVELJIC
WOLFSBERGER

A much-hyped move from Red Star Belgrade to Eintracht Frankfurt in 2019 did not work out, but he has found his feet again on loan in Austria.

FRANCK KESSIE
MILAN

Apart from Zlatan, no player has offered more to Milan's renaissance than the all-action midfielder. He has developed into the team's beating heart.

PHILIPP MAX
PSV EINDHOVEN

The attack-conscious Germany left-back has been a huge hit since joining PSV from Augsburg last year. His father Martin was a UEFA Cup winner with Schalke in 1996-97.

PORTU
REAL SOCIEDAD

Tireless warrior of a winger whose direct dribbling and long-range passing gives an extra dimension to La Real's attack. Provides endless reserves of running.

Darwin Nunez

BENFICA

Six months after signing the Uruguay striker for a club record €25m, Benfica already seem sure that Nunez will not dwell long at the Estadio da Luz. Mindful of rumours that big-hitters such as Real Madrid, Barcelona and Internazionale have their sights on the 21-year-old, Benfica coach Jorge Jesus made a telling admission in autumn: "While he [Nunez] has much still to learn, I have no doubts that he will become a top player. Unhappily for me, we'll lose him in short order."

Nunez, who learnt his trade at top Montevideo club Penarol – making his debut at the age of 18 in 2017 – has been in Europe less than two years. Last season, he was a thrilling new face for Spanish second-tier side Almeria, scoring 16 goals as the Andalusians came a creditable fourth, eventually losing to Girona in the play-offs. Suitably impressed, the Benfica management felt there was no time to waste, quickly opening negotiations with Almeria and digging deep into their pockets to finance the deal.

> **"I have no doubts that he will become a top player. Unhappily for me, we'll lose him in short order"**
> Benfica coach Jorge Jesus

"He's a youngster we believe in, and across Europe there are many others who think the same as us," said Benfica director of sport Rui Costa on Nunez's unveiling. "We know the media will focus more on his price-tag than his qualities as a player, but in our opinion he will be one of the best attackers around over the next decade."

Nunez, who netted a fine hat-trick against Lech Poznan in his first Europa League game for Benfica, boasts an excellent all-round game: fleet of foot, highly technical and intelligent in his movement, especially adept at running into space in the channels. He is strong in the air, is a cool finisher and can let fly with venom from long distance.

The youngster has four Uruguay caps after making his debut in a friendly against Peru in October 2019. With iconic strikers Edinson Cavani and Luis Suarez well into their 30s, Nunez is ready to be passed the baton.

Indeed, Cavani was strongly rumoured to be a Benfica target last summer, but eventually they plumped for his younger international colleague Nunez. The right decision in the long run.

Fixtures

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

ROUND OF 16 FIRST LEGS

February 16
RB Leipzig v Liverpool
Barcelona v PSG

February 17
Porto v Juventus
Sevilla v Borussia Dortmund

February 23
Lazio v Bayern Munich
Atletico Madrid v Chelsea

February 24
Atalanta v Real Madrid
Borussia M'gladbach v Manchester City

SECOND LEGS

March 9
Juventus v Porto
Borussia Dortmund v Sevilla

March 10
Liverpool v RB Leipzig
PSG v Barcelona

March 16
Manchester City v Borussia M'gladbach
Real Madrid v Atalanta

March 17
Bayern Munich v Lazio
Chelsea v Atletico Madrid

QUARTER-FINALS

Draw: March 19
First legs: April 6/7
Second legs: April 13/14

SEMI-FINALS

Draw: March 19
First legs: April 27/28
Second legs: May 4/5

FINAL

May 29
Ataturk Olympic Stadium, Istanbul

EUROPA LEAGUE

ROUND OF 32

February 18
Wolfsberg v Tottenham
Dynamo Kiev v Club Brugge
Real Sociedad v Manchester United
Benfica v Arsenal
Red Star Belgrade v AC Milan
Antwerp v Rangers
Slavia Prague v Leicester
RB Salzburg v Villarreal
Braga v Roma
Krasnodar v Dinamo Zagreb
Young Boys v Bayer Leverkusen
Molde v Hoffenheim
Granada v Napoli
Maccabi Tel-Aviv v Shakhtar Donetsk
Lille v Ajax
Olympiakos v PSV

Second legs on February 24 or 25

ROUND OF 16

Draw: February 26
First legs: March 11
Second legs: March 18

QUARTER-FINALS

Draw: March 19
First legs: April 8
Second legs: April 15

SEMI-FINALS

Draw: March 19
First legs: April 29
Second legs: May 6

FINAL

May 26
Gdansk Stadium, Poland

Record signing... Nunez

6 of the best January transfers

Jamie Evans rounds up the most eye-catching deals from the January transfer window

Photo: @Atleti Twitter

1 Moussa DEMBELE

LYON TO ATLETICO MADRID

Glancing at his recent numbers, it is reasonable to ask whether Dembele is a significant upgrade on Diego Costa: before sealing his loan move to Atletico Madrid, the French striker had only scored one Ligue 1 goal this season.

However, in both of his previous campaigns for Lyon, he reached the 20-goal milestone in all competitions, having earned his move to France off the back of more than 50 goals in three years at Celtic.

If the explosive centre-forward gets back to his best form at Atleti, La Liga's front-runners will have a formidable and varied attack, with Luis Suarez and Joao Felix alongside him.

The Spanish club have paid an initial fee of €1.5 million for the loan, with the option to make it permanent for €33.5m.

2 Alejandro GOMEZ

ATALANTA TO SEVILLA

After head coach Gian Piero Gasperini, "Papu" is probably the most important figure in Atalanta's recent success. Last season, their captain and playmaker assisted more goals than anybody else in Serie A, but more importantly made the team tick as the No.10 in Gasperini's 3-4-1-2 formation.

The fact that he has just turned 33 explains his modest transfer fee of €6m, but Sevilla are undoubtedly getting a fine player with plenty to offer La Liga.

At the time of his arrival, Sevilla lay fourth in the table with the second-best defence, but were the lowest scorers in the top six. Gomez's creative spark could well add another dimension to Julen Lopetegui's well-organised side.

3 Martin ODEGAARD
REAL MADRID TO ARSENAL

Having finally offloaded Mesut Ozil in January to Fenerbahce, Arsenal have gone back to Real Madrid to sign another midfield playmaker and handed him the number 11 shirt. One of the best players in La Liga during a loan spell at Real Socided in 2019-20, he was not rewarded with regular football on his return to Madrid.

His potential is huge – as a 16-year-old, he was pursued by half of Europe, including the Gunners and Premier League rivals Liverpool – and now he looks ready to fulfil it. Alongside Bukayo Saka, Gabriel Martinelli and Emile Smith Rowe, the Norwegian will be part of an exciting and youthful squad under Mikel Arteta.

4 Joakim MAEHLE
GENK TO ATALANTA

When it comes to picking up exciting young talents from across Europe, few teams can match Atalanta's recent record. So when they swoop for a €10m 23-year-old from the Belgian league, it's worth taking notice.

The Dane has quickly settled in to challenge Hans Hateboer for the right wing-back spot, offering energy and attacking output, having already claimed four assists for Genk this season.

Maehle joins Viktor Kovalenko as a new arrival in Bergamo. The Ukrainian has impressed at Shakhtar Donetsk for several years and was out of contract in the summer, but agreed to join Atalanta in January for around €700,000 – another outstanding piece of business.

5 Moises CAICEDO
INDEPENDIENTE DEL VALLE TO BRIGHTON

Photo: @officialbhafc Instagram

Every report coming out of Ecuador suggests that Brighton have a serious talent on their hands. The Seagulls spent most of January working on a deal for the 19-year-old, who had been in talks with Manchester United. The sense is that the Red Devils will be one of many clubs that will be back in for Caicedo in the future, although at a much bigger price than the £4m Brighton have just paid.

A Premier League relegation battle may not be the ideal environment for a South American teenager to find his feet in Europe, although the box-to-box midfielder wasted no time in settling in at international level: he made his Ecuador debut in 2020 and already has four caps, three assists and a goal.

6 Luka JOVIC
REAL MADRID TO EINTRACHT FRANKFURT

From a purely financial perspective, it is hard to find a better piece of business: Eintracht have re-signed their most prolific player of the last five years on loan, just 18 months after selling him for a club record fee of €65m.

The Serbian wasted no time in announcing his return either, scoring three times off the bench in his first three matches.

The problem for coach Adi Hutter is how to accommodate Jovic alongside Andre Silva – another lethal goalscorer enjoying an outstanding season – in his favoured 3-4-3 system.

DEJAN STANKOVIC

"It doesn't matter what I said yesterday, but what I'll say tomorrow"

In 2019-20, Dejan Stankovic won the Serbian league title with Red Star Belgrade, the club where he grew up. Now he wants more...

It is over a year since you were appointed as head coach of Red Star. How would you summarise that period?
Yes, it's been a year since I returned home. I am proud of my lads who did big things with me and with my coaching staff. We won the league title and we qualified for the Europa League group stage. We crowned all that with a European spring [playing in the Europa League knock-out stage], and we are on our way to winning another league title. It's early to talk about it, but I'm very proud of my coaching period in my club.

Five years ago, after a spell as Udinese's assistant, you said that coaching is not for you. What made you change your mind?
It doesn't matter what I said yesterday. What matters is what I will say tomorrow. I did have motives for why I stayed away from the coaching job. I am very attached to my family [a wife and three sons] and in this job you have to be on duty 24 hours. Often you don't know in which country or place you are. Everything has its risks, obligations and sacrifices. Back then I was convincing myself not to become a coach, but this was waiting for me behind the corner.

Red Star's general director Zvezdan Terzic said that in your telephone interview he was so impressed with your 20-minute monologue that he decided to give you the job. Can you reveal what you told him?
It's a nice story. I just came back from Shanghai and I had jet-lag. I was delighted that the director called me. Then you take a breath and the whole love towards Red Star comes out of you. How you see the team, its shape and you feel the trust. He recognized in me a crazy energy and enormous support for Red Star. He recognized the love and the ideas. I was also well-informed about the quality of the team, because I was here for the Champions League matches against Bayern and Tottenham.

Given that you spent most of your career in Italy, there was an assumption that you would play defensive football. But Red Star generally play attacking football and score lots of goals, with some exceptions in the Europa League. What is your philosophy?
My aim is to always play to score a goal more than the opponent. I think that this is exactly the purpose of football. I'm very glad that this season Red Star play more offensively and ➤

macron

more efficiently. Of course, there are still some details that will come with the time, but we are on a good track.

Your first year at the club was interrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. If it had been a normal season – without COVID-19 and the proviso of one-leg qualifiers – do you think that you might have qualified for the Champions League?

I'm still sorry that we didn't play two matches against Omonia Nicosia. If we had played a return leg [after a 1-1 draw in Cyprus] in Belgrade, in front of 50,000 fans, we would have had a big chance to kick them out. We would have earned more money for the club, even if we possibly would have been eliminated afterwards by Olympiakos [in the play-off round].

The Champions League is the elite competition. Judging by history and reputation, Red Star belongs to this competition. But, on the other hand, the Europa League is the right place for us at this point. Here we can compete and show how much quality we have.

Reaching the Europa League knockout stage is a fine success. Do you think that Red Star can achieve more in this campaign? To reach the round of 16, or even the quarter-finals?

Red Star is a big club and we surely can do a lot. If I said that we cannot reach the round of 16, then it wouldn't make sense to be where I am. I believe in our success, I believe in my team. We showed that we can achieve a lot.

In Milan, you got one of the most difficult opponents for the round of 32. How do you feel about the draw?

It's a tough opponent. They are the leaders in Serie A and we all know about their history and their great successes in Europe. In the last couple of years they were undergoing a transition, but it seems that in this season they have found balance. With [Stefano] Pioli they have gained a lot. He is an excellent coach.

It will be a spectacle, I have no doubts. Hopefully by then something changes in terms of playing behind closed doors. If we could play in a packed *Marakana* [the local name for the Rajko Mitic Stadium], that's something we would wish. Milan will continue to play league games, while we have the winter break and

Record-extending... Red Star won their 31st national league title last year

Top two...Red Star were the only team to take points off Hoffenheim in their Europa League group stage, drawing 0-0 in Belgrade

Red Star legend...Stankovic left Belgrade for Lazio after starring at France '98

Leaders...Stankovic with his captain and goalkeeper Milan Borjan after winning last season's title

developing players in a sensitive age. I played football for over 20 years and it was time to give something back to football, which gave me a lot. It was a nice experience, but now I am at Red Star and I'm fully focused on that.

Please tell us a few words about your project Deki5 (football camps for kids).
This was the third year of the camp, and for me it was the best and most successful one. In the first two years we maybe had bigger and more impressive numbers, but in spite of coronavirus, this year was the best. On two locations in Serbian mountain resorts [Zlatibor and Divcibare], our camp passed by without a single problem, without a single case of COVID-19; and for that we owe the biggest gratitude to the children and our coaches who were guiding them through all challenges of the pandemic. We made it and I'm proud. We again loved football, we again learned to smile on the pitch, we learned a lot about fair-play, psychology, protection on the internet, nutrition – and we also beat corona.

Interview by Vladimir Novak

> "The Champions League is the elite competition. Judging by history and reputation, Red Star belongs to this competition"

then the possibility to prepare better. We will be fresher, coming out straight after pre-season preparations. Milan are a good team, there are two matches and both teams will try to outplay each other.

We don't fear anybody, but we respect everybody. I am a realist in life and I am aware that we do not have the right to threaten them, but we won't give up. We'll look for our chances.

During your career you had the luck and privilege to work with several top coaches. What would you take from each of them and apply to your work?
I took patience from [Sven-Goran] Eriksson, work on the pitch from [Roberto] Mancini. From [Jose] Mourinho I would take character, and from [Sinisa] Mihajlovic perseverance and never giving up. After I joined Red Star, my former coaches wished me lots of luck, I also received some advice, but it's me who makes decisions and it will stay like that.

What can you say about the period you spent working for UEFA, as advisor for president Aleksander Ceferin and about your experience working on the development of youth football?
My role was to advise people about youth football and I believe that I helped them in

Hot-head...Stankovic shouts instructions to his team from the stands after being red carded

TAIWO AWONIYI

"Liverpool will always be the priority for me"

Taiwo Awoniyi joined Liverpool in 2015, but is yet to secure a work permit to play in the Premier League. A World Cup winner with Nigeria Under-17s, the striker is doing his best to prove himself to Jurgen Klopp and his parent club in his latest loan spell at Bundesliga underdogs Union Berlin

This loan at Union Berlin is your seventh since joining Liverpool – how does it compare to your other stints in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium?
It's always about how mentally and physically prepared you are in every challenge. Germany is a different ball game entirely in my opinion but I think they all help in shaping me. The German league, with all respect to the Netherlands and Belgian leagues, is a bit different and more competitive. The way teams set up and the tactical aspect demands a lot from the teams and players. I think it's all about growth and all these leagues have given me something different.

Your last loan, with another German side Mainz, ended when you suffered a concussion in June 2020. Do you recall that moment?
I always say that God used the referee [Marco Fritz] to save my life on the pitch before the brilliant medics intervened. The way I fell down also helped according to doctors. I don't really remember it very well because one minute I was on the pitch and the next thing I woke up in hospital. I believe that's the way that chapter was written by God. I am still here today because I still have a lot to accomplish.

This has been one of the best goalscoring seasons of your career. What's been the pick of the bunch so far?
The goal against Cologne in our 2-1 away win. It's actually my first goal this season. Before this match, I had played in games where everyone praised me for my hard work and contributions to the team. They said I should continue and that the goals will come. It helped me a lot mentally to know people appreciate the effort despite not scoring. To finally get off the mark against Cologne made it special for me.

You've said that playing for Liverpool is something out of your control due to work permit challenges. Do you still feel that way?
Liverpool will always be the priority for me and I am grateful to everyone at the club. I still don't have the work permit to play in England. But with the new rules in place, and the minutes I have played this season in Germany, no one knows what the future holds regarding the UK work permit.

If I become eligible to play in the UK, I think I can have a say on what my decision will be. Things have changed remarkably with the new rules and this will certainly help me decide my next step.

Have you heard from Jurgen Klopp or any positive words from Liverpool about your performances in Germany?
Liverpool is a very special club. They are always in contact to see how I am doing and to ensure I know that they are also following my progress out here. It motivates me to know my parent club is following up and have my best interests at heart.

Do you think you need a permanent move away from Liverpool to fulfil your Premier League dream?
Presently I am still a Liverpool player until the last day of my contract, but no one knows what the future holds. My dream has always been to play in the Premier League and it's why I ➤

1.FC UNION
wefox
ROUNDTOWN
adidas
14
32

Opener...Awoniyi celebrates after scoring his first goal of the season against Cologne

signed for Liverpool. I still keep the dream alive but if leaving will facilitate it, why not? The future is in God's hands and I keep my hope alive.

At the moment it is impossible to say what might or might not happen in the future, but I trust and believe in God and that keeps all of my hopes alive.

You joined Liverpool in 2015, two years after winning the Under-17 World Cup with Nigeria. Do you ever wish you had gone to another club?

Not at all. Life is all about process and learning. I believe all the years in between are my learning and process time and I'm still learning. So Liverpool as always will be the best choice I have made. If I had chosen another club I really can't say where I would be now, but with Liverpool I know where I started from and where I am presently.

You've said that you are proud to call yourself a Liverpool player, but would you rather be playing regularly than be a non-playing member of a championship-winning side...

Every player's ambition is to play football and back in Africa I always wanted to kick a ball at any opportunity, even with no food in my stomach. But getting to Europe I realised that football is an investment for many, a source of income, and to some fans it is their lifeline due to the bond they share with their club. So to be compensated for not making any contribution is not fair. No joy can surpass being on the field and making a contribution to achieve a collective success, it completes you as a player. I'd love to win the Premier League, but to be rewarded without playing is not for me.

Concussion...Awoniyi was knocked out in his final appearance for Mainz last season

Gernot Rohr, the Nigeria manager, is based in Germany. Have you heard from him since your breakthrough at Union?

Yes, he's been in touch. I can't really go into details. All I can say is that right now my only focus is on being successful with Union.

Do you think you've done enough to earn a chance with the Nigeria senior side?

I always say with Nigeria it is a privilege and big opportunity for any player to represent a massive nation like ours. But in terms of when and how close, the coaches are the ones who know best. On the playing side, I challenge myself to never stop learning, continue to work hard and strive for my dreams to come true. It remains everyone's dream to play for his country. Only the dead can stop hoping and

World Cup winner... Awoniyi celebrates scoring against Uruguay at the U17 World Cup in 2013

"My dream has always been to play in the Premier League and it's why I signed for Liverpool…but if leaving will facilitate it, why not?"

dreaming, so while I breathe I will continue to hope for the best.

What are your memories of the Nigeria Under-17 victory at the 2013 World Cup?
Scoring the two goals against Uruguay in the quarter-finals with the support of my team-mates. We had a great team spirit and camaraderie. I remember us gathering at midnight on the eve of a game to pray together. The bond was unbelievable and our unbeaten journey towards the final was a collective effort. The moment we won the World Cup after beating Mexico in the final was an unforgettable day – it was the beginning of our life journey as footballers.

Was there a particular moment in your youth when you thought that you would make it as a professional?
To be honest, I was just a boy playing on the streets of Ilorin [western Nigeria] before joining a local club [United Academy]. We always did everything ourselves and trekked several miles to training. I sometimes repaired my own football boots, same as my friends. We had no idea what the future would hold.

That moment never came. I was only pushed on by my strong faith to believe that time would come to change my story. Happily it did with the Nigeria Under-17s.

Who has been the biggest influence on your career so far?
My entire family have had the biggest impact. My wife, and three other special people: my first coach in Ilorin, Abdulrasak Olojo, and my mentors at the academy, Seyi Olofinjana and Bankole Atiba.

What's the best piece of advice someone has given you?
Never let go of your belief, and always remember where you come from.

How do you reflect on the pandemic and what are the lessons you've learned from it?
The virus summarises how fickle life is. Nobody saw it coming, but great kudos to all the doctors and nurses in this difficult period. We should all appreciate and love each other while we still can. No one knows what the situation will be tomorrow and hopefully it will get better for us all because it has turned everything upside down.

How do you think football has been changed by COVID?
The pandemic has changed the game a lot. Looking at my present club and their passionate fans and the love they have for this team; it's unfortunate that they can't be in the stadium to watch our decent run in the league. A lot of people want to witness the atmosphere in real time. We can only hope and pray that things return back to normal soon, for us all to be reunited and enjoy the beautiful game. Life is not the same without fans because they are the heartbeat and soul of the game.

What has it been like for a young Nigerian living and playing in Germany?
I have always loved being in Germany because it is the first place I started my professional football with FSV Frankfurt. It's very organised, quiet and a disciplined society. Without noise and distractions, it allows you to focus on what you are there for and that helps mentally.

How is your reading and speaking German coming along?
Not perfect. It is getting better, I can't really speak much but I understand a little bit and mostly all the football terms. I hope to get better.

Despite your busy schedule you've been doing some online courses. Why have you taken this step?
I already have a diploma in business administration and marketing management. Now I'm doing my Bachelor of Science in business administration. My parents wanted their children to go to school and for me to be a doctor, despite our difficult situations financially. I remember the first meeting about my trip, leaving home to the Imperial Soccer Academy. My dad's only question was to ask [academy owners] Seyi Olofinjana and Bankole Atiba if I'd be allowed to go to school, it is that important to my family.

I always enjoy learning and you can't play football forever. That is what prompted me to start some online courses.

Interview by Oluwashina Okeleji

Derby day...The striker was on target against Hertha Berlin in December

LIFE AFTER COVID

Steve Menary examines how European football's financial landscape may look after the pandemic

As European football looks to emerge from the worst of the coronavirus pandemic, a growing financial gap is accelerating the game's financial powerhouse with worrying consequences.

At the top, big clubs are suffering but remain in relatively reasonable health. Revenues at the champions of Spain, Germany, England, France, Italy and Portugal have all shrunk. Porto's revenue collapsed by 50 per cent according to the 2021 version of The European Champions Report by KPMG, but the fall was only eight per cent at Real Madrid.

Real brought in income of €681.2m in the 2019-20 season, and even made a profit after winning La Liga for a 34th time, as did Champions League winners Bayern Munich.

Supported by major television deals, the continent's elite are relatively safe and attractive to investors – investors such as ALK Capital, who recently bought out English Premier League side Burnley – but take away that income and the consequences can be devastating.

When an unprecedented TV rights deal for Ligue 1 clubs in France worth more than €1.15bn per year collapsed at the end of last year, Rennes predicted annual losses of €40m as a consequence.

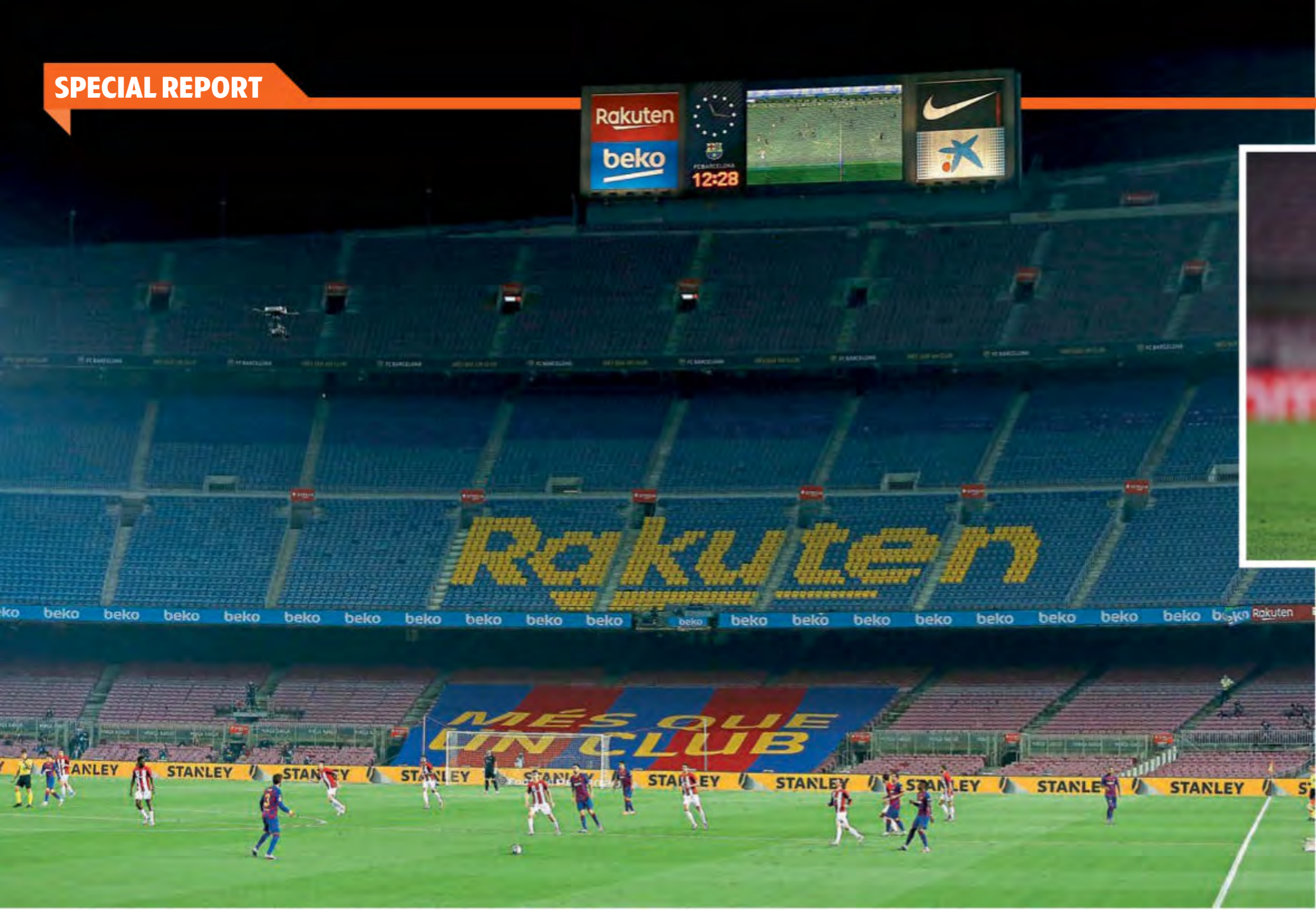
Outside of these main leagues, TV revenue is less valuable. What matters, and what is hurting clubs the most, is keeping fans outside of stadia. Matchday income comprised just 13 per cent of total Premier League revenue in 2018-19, but in neighbouring Scotland it was worth 47 per cent, according to research by Deloitte.

Even further down the European football ladder, the gap is almost incredible. In 2018, total TV revenue at the 400 clubs outside the top 20 leagues was less than a quarter of an average Premier League club according to UEFA. The value of TV rights for small clubs in small leagues is unlikely to have gone up.

Player trading has joined gate money and broadcast income as a vital source of income recently. Clubs that not so long ago challenged and won European titles are now part of a supply chain for mega-clubs with transnational followings like Real and Bayern.

Over the last five years, Benfica, Ajax, Porto, RB Salzburg and Sporting – winners of eight European Cups between them – made a profit of £1.4bn in developing and selling on major players such as Donny van de Beek and Hakim Ziyech, according to research by *The Daily Mail*.

In mid-sized European leagues, club-trained players are now three times more likely to make their



No fans allowed... playing in empty stadiums is costing clubs millions

debut, according to a study by the CIES Football Observatory. Players making their debut in Slovakia's Super Liga, for example, are the youngest in Europe's main leagues at an average age of 23.58 years.

MSK Zilina has more players in Slovak youth teams than any other Slovak club and after developing these players, sells them on – such as Robert Bozenik to Dutch side Feyenoord for €4.6m.

Dr. Raffaele Poli from the CIES Football Observatory sees the crisis posed by the pandemic as an opportunity for well-run smaller clubs but warns: "Some clubs will need to go part-time."

Part-time clubs will be less able to develop players, and to sustain the player-trading model clubs need buyers. But spending on players is shrinking.

In the summer of 2020, the English Premier League was the biggest spender with £1.26bn spent on players such as Kai Havertz, a £72m signing for Chelsea, but this total was £350m lower than the previous year according to data from website *transfermarkt*.

Barcelona acquired Miralem Pjanic from Juventus for £54m, although pulled off some creative accounting by sending Arthur the other way, while rivals Real did not spend for the first time in 40 years. Even in the Belgian Jupiler League, spending was down around £100m on the summer of 2019 to £54.5m. That figure made Belgian clubs the ninth biggest spenders in Europe, while spending at the tenth-placed Turkish Super Lig shrank 56 per cent to just £29.2m.

This threatens one of the few post-pandemic sources of hope for smaller clubs, who need money to invest in facilities and coaching. Benfica and Ajax spend up to £10m a year on academies, coaches and scouts and, for now, are easily recouping that investment.

Zilina's rivals FC DAC 1904 spent €14m on a new training centre after getting €7.4m from Hungary's government, which supports Hungarian speaking areas outside its national borders, such as Dunajska Streda. Other clubs are not so fortunate.

At the top end, more than 20 mainly American private equity firms expressed interest in a German Bundesliga plan to raise €300m to roll out an international online subscription service. Nine out of 20 clubs in France's Ligue 2 are foreign-owned – with Nancy acquired by a US/Chinese group – but the wave of Asian investment has mostly abated, says Simon Chadwick, Professor & Director of Eurasian Sport at EMLyon.

"What I find more interesting is the resurgence of US interest in football investments, the acquisition of a stake in Italy's Serie A, ALK's purchase of Burnley and the formation of Red Ball's SPAC being three notable examples," says professor Chadwick. "This serves to demonstrate that there remains some considerable commercial potential in football, especially as it convergences with the worlds of digital and entertainment."

Simon Hall, director of corporate finance at accountants BDO, who produces an annual survey of football finance, says: "US private equity in the European football space is huge. The way they generate fan engagement is streets ahead."

US interest is mainly at the higher end where fan engagement can prove lucrative. Further down, multi-club ownership is growing, such as the recent acquisition of Bulgarian club Botev Plovdiv by Anton Zingarevich, the Russian owner of Danish club Fremad Amager.

In eastern Europe, a hangover from Soviet times means that local authorities or government departments still fund part or all of some clubs, but greater strains on public funds due to the pandemic will make using taxpayers' money to fund professional football increasingly unsustainable.

With sources of money vanishing,

Trading...Arthur (left) and Miralem Pjanic (centre) swapped clubs last summer

UEFA remains the bulwark that smaller clubs will rely on. But with the next round of TV rights due to be decided this year, plans for a European Super League have again been revived, led by US bankers JPMorgan Chase & Co.

"Football's reform cannot wait," said Real Madrid president Florentino Perez at the end of 2020, but UEFA's Champions League is virtually a closed competition already.

There are now only six Champions League places available each year to qualifiers. These are often the same clubs, who use UEFA's prize money to cement their domestic domination.

Since changes in the 1994-95 season that heralded in the modern Champions League, just four Greek clubs have shared 52 places and only three Croatian clubs have appeared.

The smaller the European league, the greater the impact of UEFA money. In 16 of the 35 smaller national leagues, UEFA payments accounted for a third or more of all revenue and the combined domestic.

In San Marino, average club revenue in 2018 was €170,000, but champions Tre Penne earned €490,000 from losing their sole Champions League preliminary round qualifier to Andorran side FC Santa Coloma.

In San Marino, all money earned by sides from UEFA competition is pooled and shared between the country's 15 clubs, but such solidarity is anathema elsewhere in Europe, where clubs are increasingly reliant on benefactors.

Buying success can be cheap for brave investors. In 2018, average revenue in the Latvian Higher League was €626,000. In 2019-20, Ventspils earned €780,000 in UEFA money after reaching the third qualifying round of the Europa League, while champions FC Riga pocketed just over €1.3m after reaching the competition's play-off round.

This is a delicate balancing act and UEFA's research shows that many smaller clubs spend at least €6 for every €5 they make. "There are a number of countries where profitability remains the exception, rather than the rule," noted UEFA in its 2020 financial report, which covered the period before the pandemic. Since then, money available from benefactors is likely to have been affected.

> "There are a number of countries where profitability remains the exception, rather than the rule"
>
> UEFA's 2020 financial report

This bleak scenario increases the pressure on UEFA ahead of a decision likely this summer on the structure of the Champions League from 2024 and solidarity payments to smaller clubs.

At the start of the 2019-20 season, UEFA estimated it would make €3.25bn from European competition including the Champions League, Europa League and Super Cup, with €2.73bn (84 per cent) going to participating clubs. Just €227.5m (seven per cent) would be distributed in solidarity payments, with the remaining balance kept for administration. For the smaller clubs that emerge from the pandemic, those ratios need to change.

UEFA is planning a third European competition for smaller clubs, but details are scarce. Dubbed the Europa Conference, the tournament is unlikely to attract much interest from broadcasters, which would mean UEFA funds prize money itself to head off a potential Super League.

Ambitious smaller clubs with benefactors still in place, like Luxembourg's FC Dudelange, will however want to be in the Europa League, which the club achieved twice in a row from 2018, not a new version of UEFA's little lamented summer tournament, the Intertoto Cup.

The Europa Conference's main appeal will be to match fixers, who will relish the opportunity to manipulate UEFA matches that barely merit a mention in Europe but would attract plenty of interest on the amorphous Asian markets that are so keen on European football.

Despite the pandemic, 2020 saw a record number of alerts for suspicious betting in European football and last year huge and separate match-fixing schemes were uncovered in Armenia and Moldova.

Figures linked to match-fixing are already circling clubs in other smaller countries and as European football emerges from the pandemic, a new compact needs to be formed. If not, the consequences could be dire for large swathes of European clubs.

Sales...Ajax made almost €100m in 2020 by selling the likes of Hakim Ziyech to Chelsea

Bought out...the sale of Burnley to ALK Capital was completed in January

Glenn Moore

Jury out on Phil Neville

Tenure as Lionesses manager comes to an end after three years

Walking away... Phil Neville

There is an old theory about the Football Association, that when hiring an England manager they swing "from bookies to bishops", that each manager is the antithesis of the predecessor. So they went from Don Revie to Ron Greenwood, from Graham Taylor to Terry Venables, from Kevin Keegan to Sven Goran Eriksson. Perhaps most obviously, Sam Allardyce was succeeded by Gareth Southgate.

It appears this decades-old trend applies to the women's game, too. Hope Powell – a noted former player but rookie coach, English and female – was succeeded in late 2013 by Mark Sampson – a male, Welsh coach of no playing pedigree. When Sampson left four years later amid scandal, he was replaced by Phil Neville, a squeaky-clean former England men's international with minimal management experience.

Now Neville has left. His long-term replacement, Dutch Euro 2017 winner Sarina Wiegman, is quite a contrast, but his temporary successor is even more so. Hege Riise was a legendary player with Norway, winning 188 caps and collecting winners' medals for the World Cup, Olympics and European Championship. She subsequently has 13 years' coaching experience, which includes being on the staff as the US won Olympic gold, and latterly lifted a series of Norwegian titles with LSK Kvinner.

Riise had already been hired as Neville's assistant, replacing Tottenham-bound Rehanne Skinner, when Neville announced he was off to coach MLS club Inter Miami. Neville's decision can be understood. He said it was "just too big an opportunity for me to turn down". Nevertheless, it caught the FA on the hop. He had spoken of his desire to coach at the Olympics, at which they have responsibility for Team GB, and they had expected Neville to accept a contract extension to include Tokyo.

Riise steps up as interim coach assisted by Rhian Wilkinson, the former Canada international. She had been on the Canucks' coaching staff but quit after being beaten to the vacant head coach job by former England assistant coach Bev Priestman. If the February camp goes well, Riise will stay in charge for April and potentially the Olympics.

World Cup... Neville addresses his players at the 2019 tournament

> The legacy Neville leaves her [Hege Riise] is mixed. Success was followed by stagnation

The legacy Neville leaves her is mixed. Success was followed by stagnation and his departure, after three years and 35 matches, was greeted with a shrug and not just because coronavirus meant England failed to play a match in his last ten months.

Many supporters were very happy to see Neville go. The media, initially doubtful, then to an extent won over, had largely reverted to scepticism. The FA also seemed to have growing reservations. The players, however, mostly remained supportive even as results went awry.

A shock appointment – Neville had no previous connection with the women's game and had not even applied – he almost took England to the heights. In the 2019 World Cup semi-final against eventual winners USA, only a late missed penalty prevented England taking the tie to extra-time. Yet having been semi-finalists at the 2015 World Cup and 2017 Euros, making the last four was par. With only the US team better funded than England's, success now means reaching a final, then winning one.

In the wake of that tumultuous night in Lyon this target appeared to recede rapidly. England won three and lost six of their subsequent ten matches. Performances were disjointed and Neville felt the pressure, claiming England should "thank their lucky stars" they have him. When the Euros were pushed back a year by the pandemic the FA seemed in no great hurry to extend

his deal and he announced in April 2020 he would be leaving, as planned, in July 2021.

Wiegman was anointed his successor, but was committed to leading the Dutch at the Olympics. That left Neville as the obvious choice for Team GB, but it seemed the FA were waiting for the autumn internationals to see if the team's form revived. COVID meant those fixtures never took place and by the time the FA accepted it had to be Neville, he was in discussions with Inter Miami co-owner, and former Manchester United team-mate, David Beckham.

One area in which the Neville experiment worked was in raising the profile of the women's game, which had been a key factor in his appointment back in 2018. Secure of his status in the game and used to very high standards in his playing career, he also demanded – and got – better treatment for his players, an example being improved flying conditions and more professionalism from them.

Neville overhauled England's style, recognising that the more direct football practiced under Sampson, while successful, was unlikely to take them the next step. The issue with this was the timing: were the players really good enough to play out from the back when pressed by elite opposition? Time and time again the team lost possession in dangerous positions, especially against the US. Sampson had been initially more expansive as manager himself but opted for a more reactive style after bad results against top teams. In time the change should have benefits, but it will be interesting to see which approach Wiegman takes.

Perhaps the most significant bequest will be his faith in youth. Neville had began easing out some of the veterans and bringing in youngsters. Not all were ready, but they will benefit from the experience and players such as Manchester City trio Chloe Kelly, Lauren Hemp and Ellie Roebuck have already made an impact. If Neville was by no means a clear success, history may regard him more kindly.

Rising star... Chloe Kelly

Round-up

Kansas City...the 2015 NWSL winners

UTAH RETURN TO KANSAS

Like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz, the Utah Royals are back in Kansas, though it was a slightly longer process than clicking their heels three times. Three years after leaving the mid-west city for Utah the franchise returned, though the Royals name remains in Salt Lake City, waiting to be exhumed, potentially in 2023.

FC Kansas City, an NWSL founding member and two-time champion, folded after the 2017 season with the playing staff and league status transferred to Utah. Though the Royals were a success, averaging 10,000-plus gates, a toxic club culture was exposed in 2020 and club owner Dell Loy Hansen forced to quit the league. With no local buyer, a return to Kansas was the solution. However, gates were below 2,000 when NWSL quit Kansas so the new ownership group has plenty to do. Six of the players who left Kansas return headed by US World Cup winner and two-time Olympic champion Amy Rodriguez.

The domestic season, with newcomers Racing Louisville, will start with the NWSL Challenge Cup. This has been retained after a successful 2020 debut when it was conceived to part-replace the regular season, which was lost to COVID. Absent will be new US international Catarina Macario, who spurned the college draft to sign for European champions Lyon, and World Cup winner Abby Dahlkemper, who signed for Manchester City.

SUPPORTERS UNDER SPOTLIGHT IN AUSTRALIA

A debate on fan culture has developed in Australia after the Melbourne derby was disrupted by bottle-throwing fans. After defending W-League champions Melbourne City took a late 3-2 lead, play was suspended when a section of the Melbourne Victory support threw missiles onto the pitch close to City keeper Teagan Micah. The fans involved appeared to have crossed over from the men's A-League team.

Melbourne derby... Teagan Micah removes a can

BARCA WOMEN BACK AT HOME

Barcelona women played at the Nou Camp for the first time in half a century, marking the occasion by defeating city rivals Espanyol 5-0. The previous match, in December 1970, was an exhibition featuring Seleccio Ciutat de Barcelona, but this was a league game. Due to COVID no spectators were allowed.

LUDLOW LEAVES WALES

Jayne Ludlow stood down as manager of Wales after six years following the team's failure to make the Euro 2021 qualifying play-offs. There was also a raft of managerial changes in WSL: Rehanne Skinner succeeded duo Karen Hills and Juan Amoros, who had taken Tottenham up from the parks. Norwegian Olli Harder replaced Matt Beard at West Ham – Beard then became maternity cover for Bristol City's Tanya Oxtoby. Aston Villa brought in Marcus Bignot as interim manager. Head coach Gemma Davies, who previously had responsibility for team selection, will now work under him.

Departing... Jayne Ludlow

7,000 FOOTY GAMES ON DVD

WORLD CUPS I EURO CHAMPS I CHAMP LEAGUE I UEFA I CWC I COPA, PREM LEAGUE I LA LIGA I BARCELONA I REAL MADRID I J PELE I CRUYFF I MESSSI I MARADONA

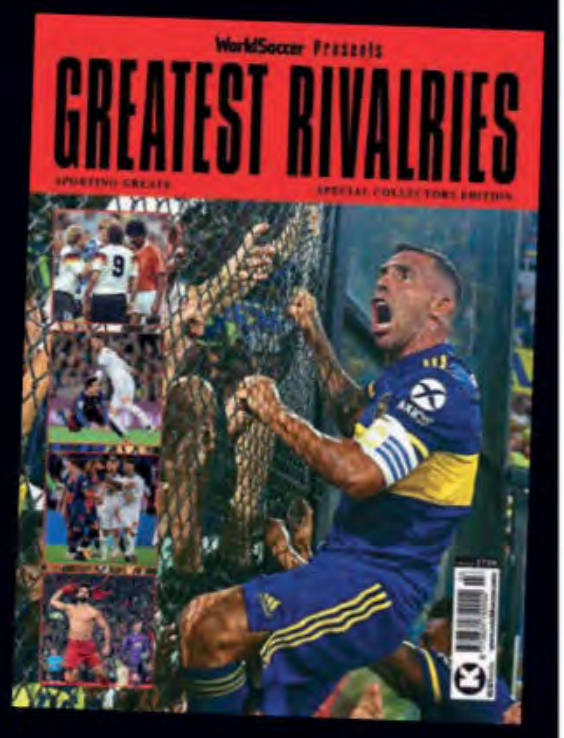
CHEAP CHEAP PRICES

FOR FULL CATALOGUE EMAIL SAMMI271@BTINTERNET.COM

WorldSoccer Presents

GREATEST RIVALRIES

SPECIAL 100-PAGE SOUVENIR BOOKAZINE ON FOOTBALL'S GREATEST DERBY CLASHES THROUGH THE EYES OF *WORLD SOCCER*



ON SALE NOW

shop.kelsey.co.uk/issue/WSP

ADVERTISING DOESN'T COST, IT PAYS!

CALL 01732 445326

EMAIL INFO@TALKMEDIASALES.CO.UK

FREE

FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES

To receive a FREE programme plus a copy of our latest catalogue (listing several thousand different mint condition Big Match, League, Scottish, Irish, Foreign and Non-League teams programmes etc.) please send your name and address to:

STEVE EARL FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES (DEPT.WS)
BROAD STREET, BUNGAY, SUFFOLK, NR35 1AH, ENGLAND

or phone 01986 892621 or visit www.footballprogs.co.uk

15 FOOTBALL LEAGUE CUP FINALS (1970s–2010s) for only £34 (inc. p&p)

(Credit/Debit Cards & PayPal accepted)

World Service

INCORPORATING Global diary

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

88

JOEL RICHARDS
Argentina

82

SAMINDRA KUNTI
Club World Cup

87

STEVE MENARY
Brunei

TIM VICKERY
South America

84

MARK GLEESON
African Champions League

90

MIKE PLASTOW
Japan

92

88

PLUS

Boca Juniors...Copa Maradona winners

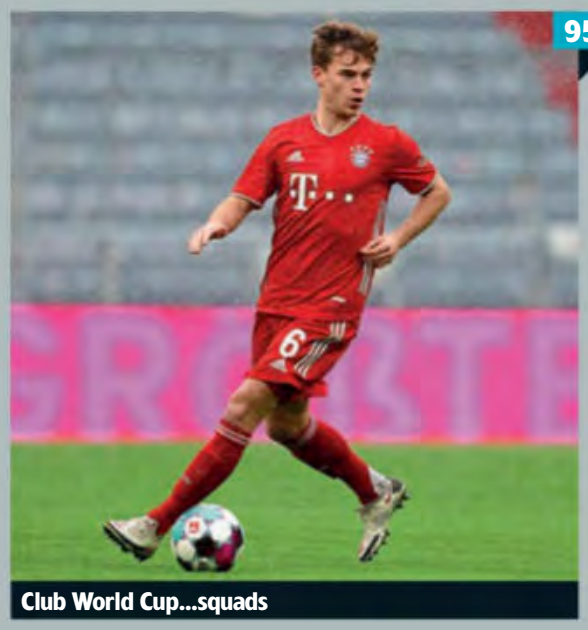
REVIEWS
82 Club World Cup
84 Copas Libertadores & Sudamericana

GLOBAL DIARY
86 Month in numbers

NEWS
87 Brunei
88 Argentina
90 African Champions League
92 Japan

SQUADS
95 Club World Cup

RESULTS, TABLES, FIXTURES
94 ESM XI
96 Club Football



95

Club World Cup...squads

FIFA Club World Cup

SAMINDRA KUNTI

Champions of the world

Bayern Munich complete sextuple of trophies in Qatar

The Club World Cup is never a priority for European clubs. Both unloved and unwanted, the tournament is even considered a distraction during busy winter months. Yet Bayern Munich, the 2020 Champions League winners, demonstrated enough German cool to win the global crown with a 1-0 victory over Mexico's Tigres UANL in the competition's final in Qatar and lift their sixth trophy in nine months.

In a low-wattage final, Bayern struggled to break down the tenacious Mexicans. Joshua Kimmich's wonderful 18th-minute strike was chalked off by VAR for Robert Lewandowski's offside, but Bayern's perpetual movement and sheer class eventually fatigued their opponents. In the 59th minute, the ball dropped to Benjamin Pavard in the box and with Tigres goalkeeper Nahuel Guzman out of position, the full-back slammed the ball into an empty net.

The Mexicans, the tournament's surprise package, were the first team from North and Central America to reach the Club World Cup final. In the semi-finals, they upset South American champions Palmeiras 1-0 thanks to a 54th-minute penalty conversion from their talismanic French striker Andre-Pierre Gignac. Crestfallen, the Brazilians were left to ponder why they had missed out on a tantalizing match-up with the European champions.

In South America, the Club World Cup matters: reaching and winning the final is considered the pinnacle a club can achieve. It is why Neymar and Santos couldn't stop talking about playing Barcelona in 2011, or why

World Champions... Manuel Neuer lifts the Club World Cup trophy

Review

Disallowed...Joshua Kimmich thought he'd opened the scoring in the final

Third place... Al Ahly coach Pitso Mosimane

30,000 Corinthians fans travelled to Yokohama a year later. It is a victory that carries huge prestige.

Palmeiras had never won the global crown, although they claim that victory in an international tournament in 1951 counts as one. In reality, local rivals Santos, Sao Paulo and Corinthians can all point to victories in the former Intercontinental Cup or the present Club World Cup.

Local bragging rights then were an extra motivation for the Brazilians, but the semi-finals have often represented a difficult obstacle. In 2019, Flamengo struggled in the semi-finals against Asian champions Al Hilal from Saudi Arabia. It took the Rio club 78 minutes to take the lead before running out 3-1 winners.

Against Tigres, Palmeiras were happy to sit back and absorb the pressure, a strategy that had worked wonderfully well in the Copa Libertadores final against Santos. Tigres' coach Ricardo Ferretti cleverly switched his wingers Javier Aquino and Luis Quinones, who, alongside the overlapping right-back Luis Rodriguez, ensured Mexican dominance. In the 54th minute, Tigres' goal arrived from a Gignac penalty. The Frenchman's presence, energy and experience galvanized Tigres.

The contrast with his counterpart Luiz Adriano at the other end of the pitch could not have been bigger. The former Shakhtar Donetsk forward was largely peripheral throughout and when a major chance finally did arrive in the second half, he failed to connect with the ball. Following in the footsteps of River Plate, Atletico Nacional, Atletico Mineiro and Internacional, Palmeiras became the fifth Copa Libertadores champions to be eliminated at the semi-final stage.

Silver Ball winner...Andre-Pierre Gignac scoring a penalty against Palmeiras in the semi-final

The result was a stinging indictment of Palmeiras and Brazil's congested calendar. Palmeiras' reactive style is typical of a football culture that is increasingly obsolete. There was not even consolation to be found in the third-place play-off, with African champions Al Ahly beating the Sao Paulo giants on penalties. The Brazilian side were punished for some dreadful spot-kicks: a bizarre, stuttering run-up and weak strike by Rony was easily saved by Mohamed El Shenawy, then Adriano was at fault again, missing the target completely. On Palmeiras' fifth and final penalty, the Egyptian keeper kept out captain Felipe Melo's effort to give his side the bronze medal, matching their previous best result in the 2006 Club World Cup.

Going into the tournament, Al Ahly's coach Pitso Mosimane had evoked the heroics of Leicester City's title-winning season to inspire his players, but his team were no match for Bayern Munich. The African champions played with the organisation and intent that had secured a 1-0 quarter-final victory over local club and host representative Al Duhail. In contrast, Bayern Munich's attitude, hunger and finesse were overwhelming. Two goals from Robert Lewandowski, the world's best striker, ensured Munich's passage to the final.

Against Tigres, Bayern were without Thomas Muller, who tested positive for COVID-19 on the morning of the final, a reminder of the health restrictions that the tournament was staged amid. Stadiums were reduced to 30 per cent capacity and fans were handed face shields at the turnstiles.

Leroy Sane deputized for Muller in an attacking line-up, but the first chance of the final fell to Gignac. The striker's unconventional personal and professional story came to symbolise Tigres' superb campaign in Doha. The Frenchman is an atypical centre-forward who has blossomed in the Mexican league, roaming around the field and spraying passes everywhere. He guided his team past Asian champions Ulsan Hyundai in the quarter-finals with a brace. Tigres, however, is more than just Gignac. The club boasts sterling credentials: a savvy coach, a formidable record in the CONCACAF Champions League and a huge fanbase.

Bayern's perpetual movement and sheer class eventually fatigued their opponents

The final against Bayern was the cherry on the cake. The Germans were not at their brilliant best, but exhibited enough quality and enterprise to record a 1-0 win and cement Europe's dominance in the competition. The team of coach Hansi Flick follows in the footsteps of Pep Guardiola's vintage Barcelona by completing a unique sextuple, the fruit of nine months of relentless excellence.

CONMEBOL Copas

TIM VICKERY

Copa Libertadores... Palmeiras lift the famous trophy at the Maracana

Review

Palmeiras are crowned champions of South America

Sao Paulo side win all-Brazilian final, while Argentine side Defensa y Justicia lift the Copa Sudamericana

The 61st final of the Copa Libertadores will be hard for fans of Palmeiras to forget – and difficult for anyone else to remember.

A goal in the ninth minute of stoppage time gave Palmeiras a 1-0 win over Santos in an all-Brazilian decider, played in Rio de Janeiro's Maracana. The unlikely hero was substitute striker Breno Lopes, plucked recently out of the second division – so recently, in fact, that he was too late for selection for the Club World Cup. Had much-vaunted teenager Gabriel Veron been fit, then Breno Lopes would almost certainly have not been on the pitch. But he was there at the far post to meet a lovely Rony cross from deep right, and he headed firmly back across into the corner to provide some late drama to an eminently forgettable match.

The main villain here was the heat. The game kicked off at 5pm in blazing high summer. In the original schedule the final would have taken place in November – springtime. The pandemic forced things back, but sadly not the start time. It seems that free-to-air Brazilian TV insisted, and so the players were forced into a sauna.

The conditions clearly made it impossible for Santos to reproduce what they had done in the two previous rounds. Broke, banned from signing players and with the club president impeached, Santos were forced to go with what they had. Coach Cuca marshalled his resources, putting his faith in youth and the team opened up the campaign with a succession of hard-fought, single goal victories. Growing in confidence, they went bold against the big guns. In the quarters and semis they earned draws away from home against Gremio of Brazil and Boca Juniors of Argentina – teams who are at the business end of the competition every year – then pressed them aggressively at home in midfield on their way to impressive 4-1 and 3-0 victories.

Match-winner... Breno Lopes celebrates

Skipper...ex-Juventus and Internazionale midfielder Felipe Melo

Copa Sudamericana... Defensa y Justicia celebrate after defeating Lanus

Such pressing was not going to be possible in the heat, and so they brought in an extra midfielder. The result was an inevitable stalemate. Under Portuguese coach Abel Ferreira, Palmeiras are essentially reactive, defending close to goal and leaving centre-forward Luiz Adriano isolated. They would bide their time, sitting deep, controlling the Santos wingers Marinho and Yeferson Soteldo. Their financial strength translates into a deep squad. With plenty more options on the bench, Palmeiras had the air of being happy to take the game into extra time; the longer the match went on, they seemed to be thinking, the greater the chance of their strength in depth tipping the balance.

After the 70-minute mark, Cuca made his move. He made his change, reverting to his usual front four, and suddenly Santos found some attacking fluidity. Seeing the space open up, Ferreira introduced Breno Lopes. At first it looked as if the Santos substitution would have more effect.

But in stoppage time, two things happened. First, Santos suffered injuries. Centre-forward Kaio Jorge had to be replaced, along with attacking left-back Felipe Jonathan, who had just gone closest to breaking the deadlock. On came two defenders, and the Santos momentum was gone.

And then Cuca got involved in a silly fracas on the touchline, grabbing the ball in an attempt to prevent a quick Palmeiras throw. It set off a jostling session – after which Cuca was sent off and, crucially, his team lost concentration.

New left-back Wellington stood too far off Rony as he shaped to cross deep on the right. With a lovely curve the ball took out both centre-backs, and there was Breno Lopes jumping against the much smaller right-back Para, winning the title for his team and allowing Palmeiras to celebrate like it was 1999 – the only previous occasion they had won the trophy.

A global audience – the match was screened to 191 countries – might have had more to celebrate had Palmeiras not managed to squeeze past River Plate of Argentina in the semi-finals.

In the first leg in Buenos Aires everything went to perfection for Abel Ferreira. Keeper Weverton transmitted security, Paraguay centre-back Gustavo Gomez organised the defence with his customary efficiency, and Palmeiras waited for River Plate's attack-minded side to self-destruct at the back. Rony was gifted a first-half goal, Luiz Adriano added a fine second, turning on the halfway line and racing away to score, and after a rattled River had Jorge Carrascal sent off, Uruguayan left-back Matias Vina glanced in a header to seal a 3-0 away win.

There was Breno Lopes...winning the title for his team and allowing Palmeiras to celebrate like it was 1999 – the only previous occasion they had won the trophy

But it was not all over. Back in Sao Paulo, Ferreira made the mistake of going with the same formation – a line-up that emphatically stated that he was not interested in possession. So Marcelo Gallardo's River had the ball, and used it to weave patterns dangerously close to the Palmeiras goal. By half-time River had pulled two goals back. After the break only VAR stopped them doing more. A goal was ruled out for a narrow offside, a penalty was overturned, and even after once more being reduced to ten men River kept coming. Right at the end the referee got off the hook when, as he contemplated another penalty decision, an earlier offside was discovered. On the balance of play there was little doubt that River deserved to go through. Even in the heat, a game featuring Gallardo's River would surely have made for a better spectacle in the Maracana. Instead, though, Palmeiras could catch their breath and prepare for an all-Brazilian final.

There was consolation for Argentina in the Copa Sudamericana. True, it is very much a second string competition. But the all-Argentine final, staged in Cordoba, was a much more attractive affair, with a convincing winner.

Lanus had the bigger-name players – such as 40-year-old centre-forward Jose Sand and teenage attacking midfielder Pedro De La Vega. But Defensa y Justicia, their neighbours from the southern suburbs of Buenos Aires, carried the day with excellent team play.

Only in the first division since 2014, Defensa y Justicia stand out because they have developed a strong identity – a back-three formation which seeks to outnumber the opposition in midfield. Players are easily slotted into the system, and the club has proved an effective launching pad for a number of promising coaching careers – now including Hernan Crespo, who guided them to their first major trophy.

Crespo took over early in 2020 when his predecessor resigned in protest at player sales. His team did him proud in a one-sided final where Defensa y Justicia dominated midfield and had Lanus running after the ball. Crespo's men were good value for their 3-0 win, the goals coming from defender Adonis Frias in the first half, striker Braian Romero in the second, and Uruguayan substitute Washington Camacho right at the end.

With some of the players on loan from River Plate, the club where Crespo made his name, it might be hard for Defensa y Justicia to hold on to this group for the coming Copa Libertadores campaign. And it might also be hard for them to hold on to their coach.

The month in numbers

The facts and stats that have caught our eye in the world of football this month...

€555m

The reported value of Lionel Messi's current four-year contract at Barcelona.

37%

NFL franchise San Francisco 49ers increased their stake in Premier League side Leeds United from 15 per cent.

86.7%

According to the Football Observatory, Atletico Madrid have the best home record of any team in Europe's top five leagues since fans were excluded from stadiums.

18

Southampton recently lost 9-0 for the second time in consecutive seasons, but only skipper James Ward-Prowse was on the pitch for all 18 goals conceded.

Ancient... Miura

54

Kazuyoshi Miura, the world's oldest player, will play beyond his 54th birthday after extending his contract with Yokohama FC.

160

The number of places between part-timers Marine and Tottenham Hotspur, when the sides met in the third round of the FA Cup.

18

Trinity Rodman – daughter of NBA legend Dennis – became the youngest player drafted in the history of the NWSL at the age of 18.

13

Bayern Munich's winning streak in the German Cup – before being knocked out of this year's competition by second-tier Holstein Kiel on penalties.

16

Thierry Small is now the youngest player in Everton's history after making his senior debut in the FA Cup aged 16 years and 176 days.

30

Schalke's losing streak that ended in January – one match short of the all-time Bundesliga record, set by Tasmania Berlin back in 1965-66.

3

Matthew Hoppe was Schalke's hero with a hat-trick – his first goals for the club – making him the first American to score a Bundesliga hat-trick.

Hoppe...Schalke hero

Prolific...Haaland

25

Erling Haaland scored 25 goals in his first 25 Bundesliga games, the best start of any striker from Europe's top five leagues this century.

8

Alexis Sanchez's missed penalty against Sampdoria in January was his eighth miss in his last 12 attempts from the spot.

1,000

The Maldini family have now played over 1,000 Serie A games for Milan, with Daniel's recent appearances adding to Cesare and Paolo's.

8

Western United's 5-4 victory over Perth Glory saw eight second-half goals – an A-League record.

Louie Barry... Villa wonderkid

18

The average age of Aston Villa's starting line-up in their FA Cup defeat to Liverpool after they were forced to play Under-23 and Under-18 players due to COVID.

150

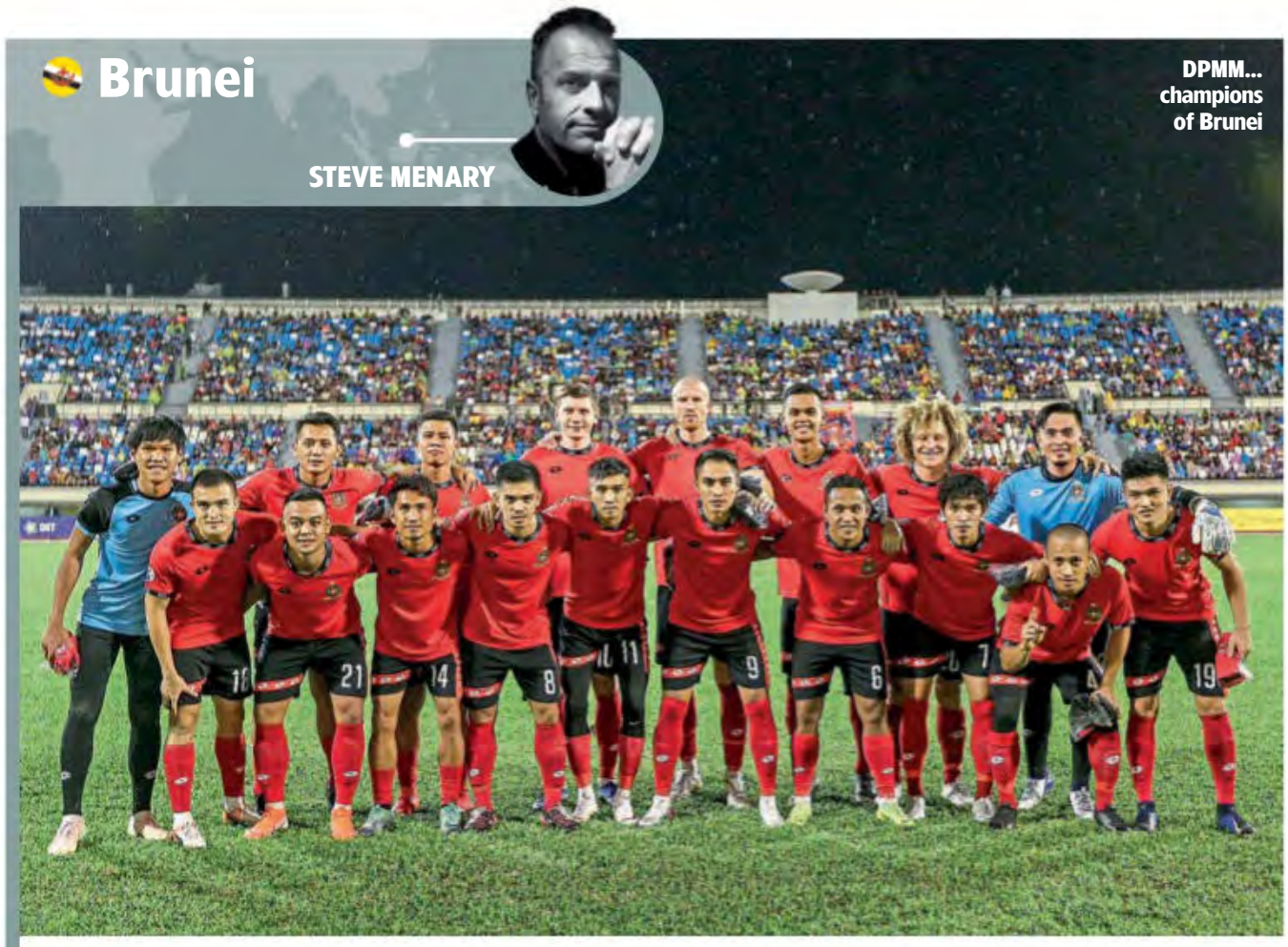
Steven Gerrard celebrated his 150th match in charge of Rangers with a crushing 5-0 victory over Ross County.

197

Bayern's Manuel Neuer set a new Bundesliga record for clean sheets.

Brunei

STEVE MENARY



DPMM... champions of Brunei

Getting back to work

Brunei have only played five matches in the last four years

Brunei Darussalam, one of Asia and the world's most inactive national teams, is preparing for a step-up in activity.

The oil-rich sultanate located on the north east coast of Borneo is expected to enter the Asian Football Federation Championship, also known as the Suzuki Cup, for only the second time in 2021.

Brunei's only other appearance was in 1996 and the country has only entered World Cup qualifying four times. This inactivity was partly due to being suspended by FIFA in 2009 for two years due to government interference.

The Hornets have entered the last two World Cups and in qualifying for Russia 2018 finally won a match, beating Taiwan 1-0, only to then lose on aggregate. Dutch coach Robbie Servais emulated this feat in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers, beating Mongolia 2-1, but lost 3-2 on aggregate in June 2019. Brunei have not played since.

"All the best local players play for Brunei's top club DPMM in the S-League in Singapore, but when I arrived their relationship with the association was not good and one by one they dropped out," says Servais, who was only there for the qualifiers and is now back in Netherlands with Maastricht.

"So I had to start working with reserve players from DPMM and players from the local amateur league. The technical level was not great so I had to build a team with good spirit.

"In Mongolia we had no chance, but it was crazy back home. There were nearly 20,000 people there and they played the game of their lives. It was a big shame as Mongolia went on to play in a group with Japan. The exposure would have been fantastic."

This inactivity was partly due to being suspended by FIFA in 2009 for two years due to government interference

The withdrawal of all 12 DPMM players selected in Servais' initial 16-man squad, as Brunei's top club were on the way to winning their second S-League title, was particularly frustrating.

DPMM, who are owned by Brunei's Crown Prince Al Muhtadee Billah, quit the local league in 2004 to play in Malaysia, then joined the S-League in 2009. That first spell was interrupted by FIFA's suspension but DPMM returned and won a first title in 2015.

British coach Adrian Pennock, formerly of Forest Green Rovers, repeated the feat in 2019 using Brunei's best players and just three foreigners. One is Englishman Charlie Clough, who says: "A lot of the DPMM players don't like the national team and there's a massive difference with the local league. We played the champions in a friendly and beat them 10-0."

DPMM withdrew from the 2020 S-League after the first two rounds due to the coronavirus. After a year of just training, DPMM's players may be keener to take part in the Suzuki Cup but to produce a consistently competitive team requires wider changes, says former technical director John Whittle.

Whittle, who left in December 2019 after 16 months, says coach education and grassroots development need addressing, as does a bias towards one of Brunei's four districts.

He explains: "I often questioned how players were selected into national age group squads, as 99 per cent of all age group squads came from Muara. It is similar with the 14 clubs that now make up the Senior League Competition: all are from Muara. Why are the clubs from Tutong, Belait and Temburong not a part of the NFABD?

"Without strategic planning across the four districts, then how can they be competitive internationally?"

If Brunei are to progress, changes are clearly required.

Charlie Clough...the former Forest Green Rovers defender starred for DPMM in the 2019 title win

JANUARY 1-JANUARY 29, 2021

Global diary

Stories from the four corners of the football world

Friday January 1

ENGLAND: Manchester United go level on points with Liverpool at the top of the Premier League with a 2-1 win against Aston Villa. Jimmy-Floyd Hasselbaink returns to Burton Albion as manager.
JAPAN: Kawasaki Frontale begin 2021 by beating Gamba Osaka 1-0 to lift the Emperor's Cup at the Tokyo National Stadium.
CHINA: Shanghai SIPG name Croatian Ivan Leko as head coach.

Saturday January 2

SCOTLAND: Rangers move 19 points clear of Celtic with a 1-0 win.
SPAIN: Real Madrid go top of La Liga by beating Celta Vigo 2-0.

Sunday January 3

SPAIN: Kieran Trippier's suspension for gambling breaches is paused while Atletico Madrid appeal. The club regain top spot with a 2-1 win at Alaves, thanks to a 90th-minute winner by Luis Suarez.
ENGLAND: Fulham's fixture with Burnley is postponed by COVID. Elsewhere, Chelsea lose 3-1 to Manchester City, who go fifth.
GERMANY: In a seven-goal thriller, Bayern Munich recover from going two goals down to beat Mainz 5-2.

Monday January 4

SPAIN: Athletic Bilbao confirm Marcelino as their new head coach.
PORTUGAL: Third-tier Olhanense appoint Edgar Davids as coach.
FRANCE: Toulouse terminate the contract of forward Adil Taoui.
JAPAN: FC Tokyo win the J.League Cup, beating Kashiwa Reysol 2-1.

Tuesday January 5

ENGLAND: Tottenham reach the Carabao Cup final with a 2-0 win over Championship side Brentford.
AUSTRALIA: Former Cardiff City midfielder Jordon Mutch joins Western Sydney Wanderers.
JORDAN: Al Wehdat defeat Al Jazeera 1-0 to win their 17th Jordanian Pro League title.

Wednesday January 6

SPAIN: Third-tier Cornella stun Atletico Madrid with a 1-0 win in the Copa del Rey. Meanwhile, ➤

Argentina

JOEL RICHARDS

Winners...Boca players celebrate winning the trophy

A fitting tribute

Boca Juniors win the Copa Maradona

The Boca Juniors players' shirts carried a simple message: "The Copa del 10 is staying at home," it read as they celebrated lifting the Copa Diego Armando Maradona.

There could be no more fitting champion of the competition, played in tribute to *El Diez,* than Boca. The club is an integral part of the Maradona mythology. The doors to the Bombonera became one of the shrines to Maradona in the days after he suffered heart failure in November.

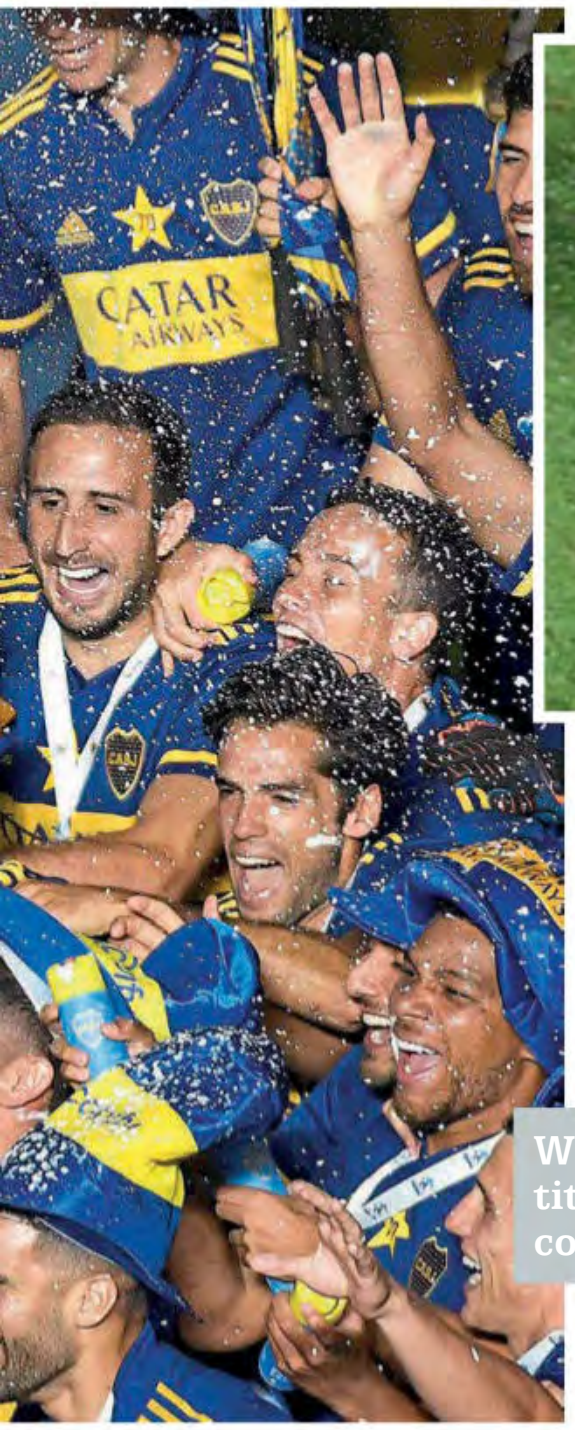
So the jubilant celebrations were tinged with emotion after a nervy final. Boca overcame Banfield in a drab clash. Colombian Edwin Cardona's fabulous strike was the only difference between the two sides well into time added on, when Banfield's Luciano Lollo produced a dramatic equaliser, taking the tie to penalties.

Yet when right-back Julio Buffarini converted the winning spot-kick, there was a greater sense of relief than of glory. While it is Boca's second domestic title in 12 months, this was a consolation prize.

Since winning the league title in March 2020, the club has focused on the Copa Libertadores. Coach Miguel Angel Russo was brought back to the club in early 2020, largely to attempt to replicate his success from 2007, when he guided Boca to lift the trophy, the last time the *Xeneize* have done so.

After six months without playing a single game during the worst of the pandemic in South America, Boca then eased through the remainder of the group phase and through the knockout rounds to the semi-final.

The week before facing Banfield, Russo's side travelled to Brazil for the return leg against Santos. The first leg in Buenos Aires had ended goalless. The clues were perhaps there to see, but the result in the second leg was still staggering. Boca's attack was blunt and its defence careless. Santos steamrollered their way to the final, defeating the Argentines 3-0. It was the manner in which Boca capitulated, with little ambition or imagination, plus ill-discipline



Stunner...Edwin Cardona celebrates his thunderous opening goal

leaving them with ten men, which sent shockwaves through the club.

"We weren't even competitive," said forward Eduardo Salvio, just one of the many players who could now leave. As the quest for a seventh Libertadores title continues, the opinions of players from Boca's successful 2000s team take on ever-greater importance.

While it is Boca's second domestic title in 12 months, this was a consolation prize

"The players didn't show character," said Chicho Serna, a midfielder from the golden 2000s era. Former goalkeeper Oscar Cordoba even told Argentine media he wanted Boca to play more like River Plate.

Much was made of how both Boca and River reached the semi-finals of the Copa Libertadores for the third consecutive year, a rare feat for any club in the competition.

Yet while River redeemed the club's image with a proud attempt to claw back from their disastrous 3-0 defeat in the first leg with Palmeiras, despite failing to do so, Boca were simply outplayed by Santos. There was all the more pressure on the side to win the Copa Maradona to put that defeat behind them.

The Copa Maradona was designed to fill a gap in the calendar for first division sides. The league ended in March 2020, and the scheduled Copa Superliga was cut short by the pandemic.

In the magical realism of Argentine football administration, ever since the Argentine FA expanded the first division to 30 teams in 2015 (it is now down to 24) the authorities have wrestled with organising league and cup competitions to fill the calendar. The result is that the domestic game is a labyrinth of competitions containing zones, groups, phases, play-offs and finals.

Boca finished top of a group featuring River Plate, who for the first time in seven years under Marcelo Gallardo went without winning a trophy or even playing a final.

In the other group that played for a place in the final, Banfield were the tournament's surprise. Only seven players in the 28-man squad are not homegrown. A team filled with youth academy players caught the eye and the imagination. Giuliano Galoppo was arguably the standout – and revelatory – player of the competition, with five goals for the 21-year-old midfielder.

With just two official titles to their name, reaching the final and pushing Boca to penalties was a strong endorsement of Banfield's model that invests in its youth system and gives those players the opportunity to prove themselves in the first team.

Many other sides fared less favourably. The other three members of the "Big Five", Independiente, Racing and San Lorenzo, all sacked their coaches. In total, nine coaches lost their jobs during or after the Copa Maradona.

While some clubs like Independiente sought experienced coaches to go forward, others placed their faith in debutants. Former Boca Juniors, Real Madrid and Roma midfielder Fernando Gago starts out as a coach with modest outfit Aldosivi.

Gago may soon find himself in the opposing dugout to a former team-mate. Carlos Tevez watched the final of Boca against Banfield from the sidelines, not starting due to personal reasons. Yet Boca's victory increased his personal trophy haul to 29, level with Lucho Gonzalez and only behind Lionel Messi (36), as the most decorated Argentine still in action. He had been rumoured to be close to retiring, but while the Apache said he'll play on this year, he also confirmed that he has started his coach's course.

Last minute... Banfield celebrate their late equaliser

Copa Maradona...the trophy was created in honour of the late great *El Diez*

Africa

MARK GLEESON

CAF Champions League kick-off

Holders Al Ahly are still the team to beat, while South African giants Kaizer Chiefs reach group stage for first time

The cast of clubs for the group phase of the latest edition of the African Champions League has an all too familiar look about it, with the expected frontrunners well satisfied with the draw and their pairings.

Al Ahly will be heavily fancied to advance from Group A and be joined in the quarter-finals in May by TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo and South African big-spenders Mamelodi Sundowns (Group B); Wydad Casablanca of Morocco (Group C) and Tunisians Esperance and Zamalek from Egypt in Group D.

Determining the two other places will ensure some intrigue in the six rounds of group action, which is completed mid-April, but there is an overwhelming sense that this will run largely to form.

Ahly, seeking to extend their record tally of trophies in the continent's top club competition to ten, start at home against Al Merrikh of Sudan, who have just appointed their second coach in a matter of months. Serbian Miodrag Jesic – last seen

> Chiefs' progress to the group phase for the first time comes amid their worst-ever start to a domestic season

Holders...Al Ahly beat Cairo rivals Zamalek in last season's final

Contenders...Zamalek beat two-time winners Esperance on their way to last year's final

in charge of Egyptian club Ismaily – replaces French coach Didier Gomes da Rosa, who has moved to Tanzania to take charge of Simba, the third team in this group. Jesic's principle task is to shake off a feeling of inferiority when his side take on Egyptian opposition.

Ahly hired the South African coach Pitso Mosimane just before they won the last edition of the Champions League, but there was no mouth-watering reunion with his former club Mamelodi Sundowns, as they were drawn into separate groups.

Last season's runners-up Zamalek also have a home start against Mouloudia Alger, while 2018 and 2019 winners Esperance host rookies Teungueth.

Point to prove...Kaizer Chiefs have reached the group stage for the first time

Coach...Pitso Mosimane left Mamelodi Sundowns for Al Ahly after the sides met in last season's quarter-finals

The Senegalese club pulled off the shock of the last preliminary round by holding Raja Casablanca of Morocco, last season's semi-finalists, to a goalless draw over two legs, before winning the subsequent penalty shootout in Casablanca. The second leg was played on a waterlogged pitch that voided any semblance of passable football and left the safety of the players badly compromised.

Teungueth is a club just a decade old, from Rufisque next to the capital Dakar, but playing their game at Thies. They were runners-up in the third tier in 2015, won the second division with a record number of points in 2016, the cup in 2019 and qualified to compete in this Champions League after being top of the Ligue 1 table in Senegal before the season was abandoned due to COVID.

They bring an unknown factor but are expected to be overwhelmed.

The other newcomers are Kaizer Chiefs, the most popular and successful club in South Africa. They won the now-defunct African Cup Winners' Cup previously in 2001 but since have shown little enthusiasm for continental adventures. Typically, South African clubs believed there to be more value in their domestic competition, which does have significant prize money and television revenue, but are beginning to change their attitude.

Ironically, Chiefs' progress to the group phase for the first time comes amid their worst-ever start to a domestic season as they grapple with a FIFA transfer ban that disqualified them from any new signings.

But the club's hierarchy say they want to prove themselves in the Champions League and this is possible. They have a difficult start in Group C, away at Wydad, but could progress at the expense of the other two clubs in the group – Petro Atletico of Angola and Horoya from Guinea.

Their attitude could all change, however, if their domestic travails. Then the temptation to hold back key players for league fixtures might be too strong to resist and leave the Champions League campaign to their fringe squad players.

All 16 competitors in the group phase had to get through preliminary round ties, except Zamalek, who had a first round bye and whose second round opponents from Chad withdrew.

The second knockout round had some controversial outcomes with former champions Asante Kotoko of Ghana disqualified ahead of their return leg tie in Sudan with Al Hilal after seven players returned positive COVID tests.

The tests were conducted in Sudan after their arrival for the second leg game. Kotoko claimed they were not true and that when players subsequently re-tested the results were negative.

They said they intended to appeal to the Confederation of African Football but are not likely to have much joy. Ghanaian official testing of Al Hilal before the first leg disqualified two of the Sudanese club's players.

It was even more suspicious as Simba overcame Zimbabwe champions FC Platinum, who also had multiple players declared ineligible after testing just two hours before kick-off of the second leg in Dar es Salaam. A deflated, and makeshift, Platinum lost 4-1 as their Tanzanian hosts overturned a 1-0 deficit from the first leg.

➤ Royston Drenthe joins Racing Murcia, just weeks after being declared bankrupt.

ENGLAND: Manchester City beat Manchester United 2-0 to join Spurs in the Carabao Cup final.

ITALY: In a key clash at the top of Serie A, champions Juventus beat leaders Milan 3-1. Milan remain a point ahead of Inter in second, while Juve move up to fourth.

FRANCE: Paris-Saint Germain draw 1-1 with Saint-Etienne in Mauricio Pochettino's first game.

CYPRUS: Former Republic of Ireland manager Mick McCarthy is sacked by APOEL just two months after his appointment.

Thursday January 7

ITALY: Former Brazil and Inter right-back Maicon joins Serie D team Sona, with his 15-year-old son also joining the semi-pro side.

Friday January 8

GERMANY: Bayern Munich throw away a 2-0 lead against Borussia Monchengladbach, losing 3-2.

Saturday January 9

ENGLAND: In the FA Cup third round, sixth-tier Chorley beat Derby 2-0, and West Bromwich Albion lose to Blackpool on penalties.

GERMANY: Jadon Sancho scores one goal and assists another as Dortmund win 3-1 at RB Leipzig.

ITALY: Milan move four points clear at the top of Serie A by beating Torino 2-0.

FRANCE: Mauricio Pochettino picks up his first win at PSG, with a 3-0 victory over Brest.

SCOTLAND: Gary Mackay-Steven joins Hearts after two seasons in MLS with New York City FC.

Sunday January 10

NETHERLANDS: Ajax come from two goals down to draw 2-2 with PSV in "*De Topper*".

ENGLAND: In the FA Cup third round, Marine host Tottenham and lose 5-0. Elsewhere, Leeds lose 3-0 to Crawley, while Brighton need penalties to overcome League Two Newport County.

BANGLADESH: Bashundhara Kings retain the Federation Cup by beating Saif Sporting Club 1-0.

ENGLAND: Former Fulham hero Tosh Chamberlain dies aged 86.

Tuesday January 12

SPAIN: Atletico Madrid beat Sevilla 2-0 to move four points clear at the top of La Liga. ➤

Japan

MIKE PLASTOW

J.League preview

Last season's runaway leaders are strong favourites to seal back-to-back titles

The Kanagawa derby between 2020 champions Kawasaki Frontale and 2019 champions Yokohama F. Marinos tops the bill on the opening day of the 2021 J.League season on February 26. But the question in Japan today is not which but if any club can catch Kawasaki, who swept all before them to win their third title in four seasons in record-breaking form in last year's punishing, tightly squeezed J.League schedule.

The big changes at Kawasaki for 2021 are in midfield, where longstanding playmaker Kengo Nakamura has retired and versatile defensive midfielder Hidemasa Morita, now 25 and knocking hard on the national team door, has left for Santa Clara in Portugal. Morita's main replacement to anchor midfield is former Sao Paulo and Rio Ave midfielder Joao Schmidt (27), who has more than proven his worth at Nagoya Grampus during the past two seasons.

While Kawasaki blinked in 2019, Yokohama's title year, Yokohama have enjoyed a wild roller-coaster ride in their first three seasons under former Australia coach Ange Postecoglou. They only avoided the relegation play-offs on goal difference in 2018, won the title in nearly invincible form at the finish in 2019, and, as defending champions, crawled back to wind up ninth last year after spending most of the first half of the season in the bottom half of the table. Yokohama have brought in two new Brazilians to firm up midfield, Elber (28) from Bahia and Leo Ceara (26) from Vitoria, but have a lot of ground to make up.

Holders...Kawasaki Frontale added the Emperor's Cup to their trophy haul on New Year's Day

The main challenge to Kawasaki is expected to come rather from Gamba Osaka, runners-up last season in both the league and Emperor's Cup and still looking to go a step further under 2020 J.League Manager of the Year Tsuneyasu Miyamoto. Gamba lost their main striker, Ademilson, at the end of last season, his contract revoked after a hit-and-run drink-driving incident, but have found an in-form replacement in tall Leandro Pereira (29), third in the 2020 scoring rankings with 15 goals in 26 games for Sanfrecce Hiroshima.

With attacking midfielder Tiago Alves (28) also joining from Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, Patric and Takashi Usami still there, plus Olympic hopeful Kazunari Ichimi (23) back from his loan to Yokohama FC, Gamba have plenty of exciting options in the attack.

Besides, Gamba have also acquired South Korea midfielder Ju Se-jong (30) from FC Seoul, the player best remembered for robbing Manuel Neuer and providing the 75-yard feed for Son Heung-min

Postecoglou... Yokohama F. Marinos boss

➤ **BOLIVIA:** Club Bolivar become a part of the City Football Group.
ENGLAND: Sheffield United win their first Premier League game of the season, beating Newcastle 1-0.

Wednesday January 13

KUWAIT: Kuwait SC come from a goal down to beat Al Qadsia 2-1 in extra-time to win their third Kuwait Crown Prince Cup in a row.

Thursday January 14

CANADA: MLS side Montreal Impact change their name to Club de Foot Montreal.

Friday January 15

NEW ZEALAND: Auckland City announce that they will withdraw from the FIFA Club World Cup due to quarantine measures.
ENGLAND: Former Arsenal and Minnesota Kicks goalkeeper Geoff Barnett passes away aged 74.

Saturday January 16

ENGLAND: West Bromwich Albion beat Wolves 3-2 in the first derby between the sides since 2012.

Sunday January 17

ENGLAND: The top-of-the-table Premier League clash between Liverpool and Manchester United ends 0-0. Later, Manchester City thump Crystal Palace 4-0.
ITALY: At the top of Serie A, Inter seal a vital 2-0 win over Juventus.

Monday January 18

ENGLAND: Bournemouth re-sign former Arsenal and England midfielder Jack Wilshere.

Tuesday January 19

GERMANY: Bayer Leverkusen go second in the Bundesliga with a 2-1 victory over Dortmund.

Wednesday January 20

ITALY: Juventus beat Napoli 2-0 to win their ninth Italian Super Cup.
ENGLAND: Manchester City go top of the Premier League with a 2-0 win over Aston Villa.

Struggling...Vissel Kobe duo Thomas Vermaelen and Andres Iniesta

Taggart... left Suwon Bluewings for Cerezo Osaka

to score South Korea's second goal against Germany deep in time added on at the 2018 World Cup. Remarkably, Gamba will be Ju's first foreign club.

Massimo Ficcadenti, now starting his third year in charge, lifted Nagoya Grampus to third place in the table last season to secure their first Asian Champions League berth since 2012. The losses of Schmidt to Kawasaki and veteran Korean defender Oh Jae-suk to Incheon United will hurt, but the attack has also been beefed up by the signing of two quality veterans, Yoichiro Kakitani from Cerezo, who played at the 2014 World Cup, and Manabu Saito, capped six times for Japan, from Kawasaki. Both had poor seasons in 2020 by their own high standards but still have plenty to offer.

> The question in Japan today is not which but if any club can catch Kawasaki

2021 could be the year of Osaka in the J.League with Cerezo, fourth last season, also advancing to the Asian Champions League play-off stage and hoping to challenge for both domestic and international success. Cerezo have turned for the third time in nearly a quarter of a century to veteran Brazilian coach Levir Culpi to mastermind those campaigns. He previously managed Cerezo in 1997 and from 2007-13, nurturing such future national team stars as Shinji Kagawa, Hotaru Yamaguchi and Takashi Inui. Levir Culpi replaces Spanish coach Miguel Angel Lotina, who moves across to Shimizu S-Pulse.

Cerezo's big signing is 2014 Australia World Cup striker Adam Taggart (27), the A-League's top scorer with Newcastle Jets in 2013-14, and K League's top scorer for Suwon Bluewings in 2019. Yoshito Okubo, now 38, also returns to Cerezo, the nest he left in 2006, from Tokyo Verdy. J.League Player of the Year in 2015 and the J.League's top scorer for three seasons in a row from 2013-15 at Kawasaki, Okubo represented Japan at the 2010 and 2014 World Cups. But the illustrious veteran has been warned not to expect any favours. Cerezo director of football Satoshi Kajino says Okubo will have to prove his worth or may last only a couple of months, if that, at his old club.

Cerezo have, meanwhile, lost three core foreign players, striker Bruno Mendes to Avispa Fukuoka, midfielder Leandro Luis Desabato, and Croatian defender Matej Jonjic, who only missed one league game for Cerezo in the past four seasons, to Shanghai Greenland Shenhua. It waits to be seen how this will pan out.

Kashima Antlers, FC Tokyo and Kashiwa Reysol can also be expected to mount strong challenges. Kashima, champions eight times, haven't won anything for four seasons since their league and Emperor's Cup double of 2016, the year they were also runners-up to Real Madrid in the FIFA Club World Cup, but have always stayed in the hunt and Everaldo, especially, was on fire last season with 18 goals. Kashima have added two Brazilian midfielders to their squad, Arthur Caike from Cruzeiro (where he was on loan from Saudi club Al Shabab) and Diego Pituca from Santos.

FC Tokyo have made few changes for Kenta Hasegawa's fourth year in charge but Kashiwa must now learn to live without 2020 J.League top scorer Michael Olunga, who has moved on to Al Duhail of Qatar. There could be pain at the back as well, where Kashiwa have lost rising Japan keeper Kosuke Nakamura to Portimonense.

With four teams going down this season (two came up but none were relegated last year due to COVID) the 2021 relegation battle may be especially brutal. Shonan Bellmare and Vegalta Sendai were the clubs spared automatic relegation in 2020 but many others in the now 20-team first division will also have to focus on avoiding the drop. That number may even include 2020 Asian Champions League semi-finalists Vissel Kobe, the club of Andres Iniesta, Thomas Vermaelen and Sergi Samper, who require a drastic upturn in domestic form after winding up fifth from bottom last season.

One to watch... Kashima Antlers forward Everaldo

Thursday January 21

SPAIN: Barcelona and Athletic Bilbao survive Copa del Rey scares against third-tier sides. Barca beat Cornella in extra-time and Athletic score in the 90th minute in Ibiza.

Friday January 22

UAE: Shabab Al Ahli beat Sharjah 1-0 in the UAE Super Cup.
FRANCE: PSG move three points clear at the top of Ligue 1 after a 4-0 victory over Montpellier.

Saturday January 23

ENGLAND: Cheltenham Town score first but lose 3-1 to Manchester City in the FA Cup.
ITALY: Milan remain top of Serie A despite a 3-0 defeat to Atalanta.

Sunday January 24

ASIA: Tottenham forward Son Heung-min is named the AFC's Best International Player of 2020.
ENGLAND: Manchester United beat Liverpool 3-2 at Old Trafford in the FA Cup fourth round.

Tuesday January 26

ENGLAND: West Ham United move into the top four with a 3-2 victory at London rivals Crystal Palace.
ITALY: Inter come out on top in a feisty Milan derby to reach the Coppa Italia semi-finals.

Wednesday January 27

ENGLAND: In one of the season's biggest upsets, Sheffield United win 2-1 at Old Trafford.
ITALY: In another Coppa Italia thriller, ten-man Atalanta come from 2-1 down to beat Lazio 3-2.

Thursday January 28

ENGLAND: Liverpool end a five-match winless run in the league with a 3-1 win at Tottenham.

Friday January 29

USA: Japan withdraw from February's SheBelieves Cup in Florida due to a surge in coronavirus cases in the USA.

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

JANUARY 2021

SEASON RANKINGS
Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Jan Oblak (Atletico Madrid)	20
Ederson (Manchester City)	5
Edouard Mendy (Chelsea)	5
Gianluigi Donnarumma (Milan)	4
David De Gea (Manchester United)	3
Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich	2
Thibaut Courtois (Real Madrid)	2
Andrea Consigli (Sassuolo)	1
Alex Remiro (Real Sociedad)	1
Koen Casteels (Wolfsburg)	1
David Marshall (Derby County)	1
Hugo Lloris (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus)	1
Antonio Adan (Sporting)	1
Alisson (Liverpool)	1
Bernd Leno (Arsenal)	1
Mike Maignan (Lille)	1
Bono (Sevilla)	1

DEFENDERS

Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid)	14
Theo Hernandez (Milan)	11
Angelino (RB Leipzig)	10
Ruben Dias (Manchester City)	9
Mario Hermoso (Atletico Madrid)	9
Stefan Savic (Atletico Madrid)	8
Jose Gimenez (Atletico Madrid)	8
Andy Robertson (Liverpool)	7
Achraf Hakimi (Internazionale)	7
Joao Cancelo (Manchester City)	7
John Stones (Manchester City)	6
David Alaba (Bayern Munich)	6
Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund)	5
Benjamin Pavard (Bayern Munich)	5
Dayot Upamecano (RB Leipzig)	5
Ben Chilwell (Chelsea)	4
Juan Cuadrado (Juventus)	4
Simon Kjaer (Milan)	4
Kieran Trippier (Atletico Madrid)	4
Kurt Zouma (Chelsea)	4
Thiago Silva (Chelsea)	3
Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool)	3
Dani Carvajal (Real Madrid)	3
Danilo (Juventus)	3
Jose Fonte (Lille)	3
Guillermo Maripan (Monaco)	2
Felipe (Atletico Madrid)	2
Reece James (Chelsea)	2
Thomas Meunier (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Sergio Reguilon (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Alessio Romagnoli (Milan)	2
Lucas Vazquez (Real Madrid)	2
Francesco Acerbi (Lazio)	1
Toby Alderweireld (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Jordan Amavi (Marseille)	1
Dedryck Boyata (Hertha Berlin)	1
Cala (Cadiz)	1
Davide Calabria (Milan)	1
Sebastian Coates (Sporting)	1
Eric Dier (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Dodo (Shakhtar Donetsk)	1
Jean-Kevin Duverne (Brest)	1
Fabinho (Liverpool)	1
Faitout Maouassa (Rennes)	1
Nicolas Gavory (Standard Liege)	1
Vincenzo Grifo (Freiburg)	1
Raphael Guerreiro (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Lucas Hernandez (Bayern Munich)	1
Michael Keane (Everton)	1
Joules Kounde (Sevilla)	1
Harry Maguire (Manchester United)	1
Chancel Mbemba (Porto)	1
Willi Orban (RB Leipzig)	1
Pepe (Porto)	1
Zaidu Sanusi (Porto)	1
Niklas Sule (Bayern Munich)	1
Pau Torres (Villarreal)	1
Raphael Varane (Real Madrid)	1
Kyle Walker (Manchester City)	1
Cristian Romero (Atalanta)	1
Jordi Alba (Barcelona)	1
Stefan de Vrij (Internazionale)	1
Ronald Araujo (Barcelona)	1
Robin Gosens (Atalanta)	1
Nico Elvedi (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1
Brandon Mechele (Club Brugge)	1
Nuno Mendes (Sporting)	1
Leonardo Spinazzola (Roma)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United)	19
Son Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur)	14
Ilkay Gundogan (Manchester City)	14
Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich)	14
Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City)	12
Mikel Oyarzabal (Real Sociedad)	6
Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich)	6
Frenkie de Jong (Barcelona)	6
Diogo Jota (Liverpool)	5
Luka Modric (Real Madrid)	5
Casemiro (Real Madrid)	4
Mikel Merino (Real Sociedad)	4
Leon Goretzka (Bayern Munich)	3
Hakan Calhanoglu (Milan)	3
Franck Kessie (Milan)	3
Houssem Aouar (Lyon)	2
Karl Toko Ekambi (Lyon)	2
Lars Stindl (Borussia Monchengladbach)	2
Toni Kroos (Real Madrid)	2
Kingsley Coman (Bayern Munich)	2
Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg (Tottenham)	2
Max Kruse (Union Berlin)	2
James Rodriguez (Everton)	2
David Silva (Real Sociedad)	2
Angel Di Maria (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Benjamin Andre (Lille)	1
James Maddison (Leicester City)	1
Leon Bailey (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Jonathan Bamba (Lille)	1
Ismael Bennacer (Milan)	1
Domenico Berardi (Sassuolo)	1
Phil Foden (Manchester City)	1
Papu Gomez (Sevilla)	1

Jack Grealish (Aston Villa)	1
N'Golo Kante (Chelsea)	1
Davy Klaassen (Ajax)	1
Koke (Atletico Madrid)	1
Manuel Locatelli (Sassuolo)	1
Sergej Milinkovic-Savic (Lazio)	1
Dani Olmo (RB Leipzig)	1
Riyad Mahrez (Manchester City)	1
Henrikh Mkhitaryan (Roma)	1
Mason Mount (Chelsea)	1
Leandro Paredes (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Yusuf Yazici (Lille)	1
Pedri (Barcelona)	1
Luis Alberto (Lazio)	1
Marcos Llorente (Atletico Madrid)	1
Raul Garcia (Athletic Bilbao)	1
Nicolo Barella (Internazionale)	1
Jordan Henderson (Liverpool)	1
Thomas Lemar (Atletico Madrid)	1
Paul Pogba (Manchester United)	1

FORWARDS

Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich)	39
Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)	14
Erling Haaland (Borussia Dortmund)	12
Romelu Lukaku (Internazionale)	9
Joao Felix (Atletico Madrid)	7
Cristiano Ronaldo (Juventus)	7
Harry Kane (Tottenham Hotspur)	6
Youssef En-Nesyri (Sevilla)	6
Luis Suarez (Atletico Madrid)	6
Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)	6
Lionel Messi (Barcelona)	5
Kylian Mbappe (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Mohamed Salah (Liverpool)	4
Ciro Immobile (Lazio)	4
Marcus Rashford (Manchester United)	3
Andre Silva (Eintracht Frankfurt)	3
Jamie Vardy (Leicester City)	2
Burak Yilmaz (Lille)	2
Pote (Sporting)	1
Iago Aspas (Celta Vigo)	1
Anwar El Ghazi (Aston Villa)	1
Olivier Giroud (Chelsea)	1
Sadio Mane (Liverpool)	1
Dominic Calvert-Lewin (Everton)	1
Alvaro Morata (Juventus)	1
Kevin Volland (Monaco)	1
Hakim Ziyech (Chelsea)	1
Giorgos Giakoumakis (VVV-Venlo)	1
Josip Ilicic (Atalanta)	1
Antoine Griezmann (Barcelona)	1
Jadon Sancho (Borussia Dortmund)	1

ESM MEMBERS: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Italy), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *Sport Express* (Russia), *Sport/Foot* (Belgium), *De Telegraaf* (Netherlands), *TIPS Bladet* (Denmark), *ElfVoetbal* (Netherlands), *World Soccer* (England)

AL AHLY (EGY)

GOALKEEPERS

1 Mohamed **EL SHENAWY** (32) 18.12.88
16 Ali **LOTFY** (31) 14.10.89
31 Mostafa **SHOUBIR** (20) 15.05.00

DEFENDERS

3 Ahmed **RAMADAN** (23) 23.05.97
6 Yasser **IBRAHIM** (28) 10.02.93
12 Ayman **ASHRAF** (29) 09.04.91
13 Badr **BENOUN** (Mar) (27) 30.09.93
20 Saad **SAMIR** (31) 01.04.89
21 Ali **MAALOUL** (Tun) (31) 01.01.90
30 Mohamed **HANY** (25) 25.01.96

MIDFIELDERS

8 Hamdy **FATHY** (26) 01.10.94
14 Hussein **EL SHAHAT** (28) 21.06.92
15 Aliou **DIENG** (Mli) (23) 16.10.97
17 Amr **EL SOULIA** (30) 02.04.90
19 Mohamed **AFSHA** (24) 05.03.96
25 Akram **TAWFIK** (23) 08.11.97

FORWARDS

7 Mahmoud **KAHRABA** (26) 13.04.94
9 Marwan **MOHSEN** (31) 26.02.89
10 Mohamed **SHERIF** (25) 04.02.96
18 Salah **MOHSEN** (22) 01.09.98
26 Walter **BWALYA** (Cod) (25) 05.05.95
27 Taher **MOHAMED** (23) 07.03.97
28 Junior **AJAYI** (Nga) (25) 29.01.96

COACH

Pitso **MOSIMANE** (Rsa) (56) 26.07.64

AL DUHAIL (QAT)

GOALKEEPERS

1 Mohammed **AL BAKRI** (23) 28.03.97
16 Khalifa **ABABACAR** (31) 07.07.89
21 Salah **ZAKARIA** (21) 24.04.99

DEFENDERS

2 Mohammed **MOUSSA** (34) 23.03.86
3 Ali **MALOLAH** (21) 26.02.99
4 Mehdi **BENATIA** (Mor) (33) 17.04.87
5 Bassam **HISHAM** (23) 16.12.97
6 Ahmed **YASSER** (26) 17.05.94
18 Sultan **AL BRAKE** (24) 07.04.96

MIDFIELDERS

7 Ismail **MOHAMAD** (30) 05.04.90
8 Luiz **JUNIOR** (32) 13.01.89
12 Karim **BOUDIAF** (30) 16.09.90
14 Abdullah **AL AHRAK** (23) 10.05.97
20 Ali **AFIF** (33) 20.01.88
22 Khaled **MOHAMED** (20) 07.06.00
23 Assim **MADIBO** (24) 22.10.96
24 Ali **KARIMI** (Irn) (27) 11.02.94

FORWARDS

10 **EDMILSON** (Bel) (26) 19.08.94
13 Mubarak **SHANAN** (16) 20.02.04
19 Almoez **ALI** (24) 19.08.96
26 Michael **OLUNGA** (Ken) (26) 26.03.94
29 Mohammed **MUNTARI** (27) 20.12.93
77 **DUDU** (Bra) (29) 07.01.92

COACH

Sabri **LAMOUCHI** (Fra) (49) 09.11.71

BAYERN MUNICH (GER)

GOALKEEPERS

1 Manuel **NEUER** (34) 27.03.86
35 Alexander **NUBEL** (24) 30.09.96
39 Ron-Thorben **HOFFMANN** (21) 04.04.99

DEFENDERS

4 Niklas **SULE** (25) 03.09.95
5 Benjamin **PAVARD** (Fra) (24) 28.03.96
8 Javi **MARTINEZ** (Esp) (32) 02.09.88
17 Jerome **BOATENG** (32) 03.09.88
19 Alphonso **DAVIES** (Can) (20) 02.11.00
20 Bouna **SARR** (Fra) (29) 31.01.92
21 Lucas **HERNANDEZ** (Fra) (25) 14.02.96
27 David **ALABA** (Aut) (28) 24.06.92

MIDFIELDERS

6 Joshua **KIMMICH** (26) 08.02.95
18 Leon **GORETZKA** (26) 06.02.95
22 Marc **ROCA** (Esp) (24) 26.11.96
24 Corentin **TOLISSO** (Fra) (26) 03.08.94
25 Thomas **MULLER** (31) 13.09.89
42 Jamal **MUSIALA** (Eng) (17) 26.02.03

FORWARDS

7 Serge **GNABRY** (25) 14.07.95
9 Robert **LEWANDOWSKI** (Pol) (32) 21.08.88
10 Leroy **SANE** (25) 11.01.96
11 **DOUGLAS COSTA** (Bra) (30) 14.09.90
13 Eric Maxim **CHOUPO-MOTING** (Cmr) (31) 23.03.89
29 Kingsley **COMAN** (Fra) (24) 13.06.96

COACH

Hansi **FLICK** (55) 24.02.65

Experienced...former Bayern Munich defender Mehdi Benatia now plays for Al Duhail

PALMEIRAS (BRA)

GOALKEEPERS

1 **WEVERTON** (33) 13.12.87
22 **JAILSON** (39) 20.07.81
24 **VINICIUS** (26) 28.03.94

DEFENDERS

2 **MARCOS ROCHA** (22) 11.12.88
3 **EMERSON** (25) 05.04.95
4 Benjamin **KUSCEVIC** (Chi) (24) 02.05.96
6 **EMPEREUR** (26) 10.03.94
12 **MAYKE** (28) 10.11.92
13 **LUAN** (27) 10.05.93
15 Gustavo **GOMEZ** (Par) (27) 06.05.93
17 Matias **VINA** (Uru) (23) 09.11.97

MIDFIELDERS

5 Patrick **DE PAULA** (21) 08.09.99
8 **ZE RAFAEL** (27) 16.06.93
14 Gustavo **SCARPA** (27) 05.01.94
20 **LUCAS LIMA** (30) 09.07.90
23 Raphael **VEIGA** (25) 19.06.95
25 Gabriel **MENINO** (20) 29.09.00
28 **DANILO** (19) 19.04.01
30 **FELIPE MELO** (37) 26.06.83

FORWARDS

10 **LUIZ ADRIANO** (33) 12.04.87
11 **RONY** (25) 11.05.95
27 Gabriel **VERON** (18) 03.09.02
29 **WILLIAN** (34) 19.11.86

COACH

Abel **FERREIRA** (Por) (42) 22.12.78

Lethal...Robert Lewandowski's goalscoring exploits for Bayern haven't slowed down this season

TIGRES UANL (MEX)

GOALKEEPERS

1 Nahuel **GUZMAN** (Arg) (35) 10.02.86
35 Juan Pablo **CHAVEZ** (24) 16.07.96
50 Arturo **DELGADO** (19) 18.02.02

DEFENDERS

3 Carlos **SALCEDO** (27) 29.09.93
4 Hugo **AYALA** (33) 31.03.87
13 Diego **REYES** (28) 19.09.92
14 Juan Sanchez **PURATA** (23) 09.01.98
18 Aldo **CRUZ** (23) 24.09.97
21 Francisco **MEZA** (Col) (29) 29.08.91
28 Luis **RODRIGUEZ** (30) 21.01.91
43 Erick **AVALOS** (20) 21.04.00

MIDFIELDERS

5 Rafael **CARIOCA** (Bra) (31) 18.06.89
8 Jordan **SIERRA** (Ecu) (23) 23.04.97
17 Leonardo **FERNANDEZ** (Uru) (22) 08.11.98
19 Guido **PIZARRO** (Arg) (30) 26.02.90
20 Javier **AQUINO** (31) 11.02.90
22 Raymundo **FULGENCIO** (21) 12.02.00
23 Luis **QUINONES** (Col) (29) 26.06.91
29 Jesus **DUENAS** (31) 16.03.89

FORWARDS

10 Andre-Pierre **GIGNAC** (Fra) (35) 05.12.85
32 Carlos **GONZALEZ** (Par) (28) 04.02.93
33 Julian **QUINONES** (Col) (23) 24.03.97
52 Patrick **OGAMA** (20) 22.03.00

COACH

Ricardo **FERRETTI** (66) 22.02.54

ULSAN HYUNDAI (KOR)

GOALKEEPERS

1 **JO** Su-huk (33) 18.03.87
21 **JO** Hyeon-woo (29) 25.09.91
25 **SEO** Ju-hwan (21) 24.06.99

DEFENDERS

2 **BAE** Jae-woo (27) 17.05.93
3 Jason **DAVIDSON** (Aus) (29) 29.06.91
4 Davy **BULTHUIS** (Ned) (30) 28.06.90
5 **KIM** Tae-hyeon (20) 17.09.00
6 **SHIN** Hyung-min (34) 18.07.86
23 **KIM** Tae-hwan (31) 24.07.89
44 **KIM** Kee-hee (31) 13.07.89
66 **SEOL** Young-woo (22) 05.12.98

MIDFIELDERS

7 **KIM** In-sung (31) 09.09.89
10 **YOON** Bit-garam (30) 07.05.90
13 **KIM** Min-jun (21) 12.02.00
16 **WON** Du-jae (23) 18.11.97
17 **KIM** Sung-joon (32) 08.04.88
20 **KANG** Dong-hyeok (21) 21.07.99
24 **KANG** Yun-gu (19) 08.02.02
28 **LEE** Ho (36) 22.10.84

FORWARDS

9 **Kim** Ji-hyun (24) 22.07.96
11 **LEE** Dong-jun (23) 01.02.97
29 **LEE** Hyeong-kyeong (22) 11.05.98
91 Lukas **HINTERSEER** (Aut) (30) 28.03.91

COACH

HONG Myung-Bo (52) 12.02.69

(ages correct as of 19.02.21)

Club football

EUROPE

CARABAO CUP 2020-21

Quarter-Finals

Dec 22 - London
Brentford 1 (Dasilva 66)
Newcastle United 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Jones (Eng)
Brentford: Daniels - Fosu-Henry, Pinnock, Bech Sorensen, Thompson, Dasilva (Jensen 81), Janelt (Norgaard 60), Marcondes, Canos (Toney 69), Forss, Ghoddos.
Newcastle United: Darlow - Yedlin, Hayden, Clark, Lewis (Carroll 80), Shelvey, S. Longstaff, Murphy, Almiron (Gayle 65), Fraser (Joelinton 65), Wilson.

Dec 22 - London
Arsenal 1 (Lacazette 31)
Manchester City 4 (Gabriel Jesus 3, Mahrez 54, Foden 59, Laporte 73)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Attwell (Eng)
Arsenal: Runarsson - Mustafi, Gabriel, Kolasinac, Cedric Soares, Elneny (Smith Rowe 66), Ceballos, Maitland-Niles, Willock, Lacazette (Balogun 77), Martinelli (Pepe 49).
Manchester City: Steffen - Cancelo, Ruben Dias, Laporte, Zinchenko, Rodri (Walker 77), Fernandinho, Mahrez, Bernardo Silva (Torres 70), Foden, Gabriel Jesus (Aguero 74).

Dec 23 - Stoke
Stoke City 1 (Thompson 53)
Tottenham Hotspur 3 (Bale 22, Davies 70, Kane 81)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** England (Eng)
Stoke City: Lonergan - Collins, Souttar, Batth, Smith, Cousins, Thompson, Fox (Fletcher 34), Oakley-Boothe (Vokes 79), Brown (Powell 71), McClean.
Tottenham Hotspur: Lloris - Doherty, Sanchez, Dier, Davies, Hojbjerg, Winks, Bale (Son Heung-Min 45), Alli (Lamela 66), Lucas Moura (Sissoko 66), Kane.

Dec 23 - Liverpool
Everton 0
Manchester United 2 (Cavani 88, Martial 90+6)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Madley (Eng)
Everton: Olsen - Coleman, Mina, Keane, Godfrey, Doucoure (Tosun 89), Andre Gomes (Davies 58), Iwobi, Sigurdsson, Richarlison (Bernard 56), Calvert-Lewin.
Manchester United: Henderson - Tuanzebe, Bailly, Maguire, Telles (Shaw 84), Pogba, Matic, Greenwood (Rashford 67), Bruno Fernandes, Van De Beek (Martial 67), Cavani.

Semi-Finals

Jan 5 - London
Tottenham Hotspur 2 (Sissoko 12, Son Heung-Min 70)
Brentford 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Dean (Eng)
Tottenham Hotspur: Lloris - Aurier, Sanchez, Dier, Reguilon (Davies 71), Sissoko, Hojbjerg (Tanganga 86), Lucas Moura (Winks 71), Ndombele, Son Heung-Min (Carlos Vinicius 89), Kane.
Brentford: Raya - Dalsgaard, Pinnock, Bech Sorensen, Henry, Dasilva, Janelt (Marcondes 74), Jensen, Mbeumo (Forss 81), Toney, Canos (Fosu-Henry 74). *Sent off: Dasilva 84.*

Jan 6 - Manchester
Manchester United 0
Manchester City 2 (Stones 50, Fernandinho 83)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Atkinson (Eng)
Manchester United: Henderson - Wan-Bissaka, Lindelof, Maguire, Shaw, McTominay (Greenwood 75), Fred (Van De Beek 88), Rashford, Bruno Fernandes, Pogba, Martial.
Manchester City: Steffen - Cancelo, Stones, Ruben Dias, Zinchenko, De Bruyne, Fernandinho, Gundogan, Sterling, Mahrez (Rodri 79), Foden.

Final

Apr 25 - London
Tottenham Hotspur
Manchester City

TROPHEE DES CHAMPIONS 2020

January 13 - Lens
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Icardi 39, Neymar 85 pen)
Marseille 1 (Payet 89)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Buquet (Fra)

SPANISH SUPER CUP 2020-21

Semi-Finals

January 13 - Cordoba
Real Sociedad 1 (Oyarzabal 51 pen)
Barcelona 1* (De Jong 39)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Munuera (Esp)
**Barcelona win 3-2 on penalties after extra-time*

January 14 - Malaga
Real Madrid 1 (Benzema 73)
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Raul Garcia 18, 38 pen)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Martinez (Esp)

Final

January 17 - Sevilla
Barcelona 2 (Griezmann 40, 77)
Athletic Bilbao 3 (De Marcos 42, Asier Villalibre 90, Williams 93)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Jesus Gil (Esp)
After extra-time

NORTH AMERICA

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2020

Quarter-Finals - 2nd Leg

Dec 16 - Orlando
Olimpia 0 (2)*
Montreal Impact 1 (2) (Sejdic 57)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Montero (Crc)
**Olimpia win on away goals*

Dec 16 - Orlando
Tigres 4 (5) (Gignac 30, Fernandez 49, Rafael Carioca 64, Aquino 85)
New York City FC 0 (0)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Parchment (Jam)

Dec 17 - Orlando
Atlanta United 1 (1) (Conway 82)
Club America 0 (3)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Cornejo (Slv)

Quarter-Final

Dec 17 - Orlando
Los Angeles FC 2 (Vela 38 pen, Opoku 71)
Cruz Azul 1 (Yotun 15 pen)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Martinez (Hon)

Semi-Finals

Dec 20 - Orlando
Tigres 3 (Gignac 45+4 pen, 57 pen, Oliva 78 og)
Olimpia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Cisneros (Slv)

Dec 20 - Orlando
Los Angeles FC 3 (Vela 46, 47, Blessing 90+5)
Club America 1 (Caceres 11)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Calderon (Crc)

Final

Dec 23 - Orlando
Tigres 2 (Ayala 72, Gignac 84)
Los Angeles FC 1 (Rossi 61)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Escobar (Gua)

SOUTH AMERICA

COPA LIBERTADORES 2020

Quarter-Finals - 1st Leg

Dec 9 - Asuncion
Libertad 1 (Espinoza 62)
Palmeiras 1 (Gomez 39)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Rapallini (Arg)

Dec 9 - Rio Grande Do Sul
Gremio 1 (Souza 90+12 pen)
Santos 1 (Jorge 36)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Benitez (Par)

Dec 11 - Buenos Aires
River Plate 2 (Montiel 67 pen, Zuculini 90+6)
Nacional 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Rojas (Col)

Dec 17 - Buenos Aires
Racing Club 1 (Melgarejo 60)
Boca Juniors 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ostojich (Uru)

Quarter-Finals - 2nd Leg

Dec 16 - Sao Paulo
Palmeiras 3 (4) (Scarpa 21, Rony 68, Menino 82)
Libertad 0 (1)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)

Dec 16 - Sao Paulo
Santos 4 (5) (Jorge 1, 54, Marinho 16, Laercio 83)
Gremio 1 (2) (Thaciano 81)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

Dec 18 - Montevideo
Nacional 2 (2) (Cougo 45+1, Rodriguez 54)
River Plate 6 (8) (Carrascal 28, De La Cruz 45, Zuculini 50, Borre 67, 73, 80)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)

Dec 24 - Buenos Aires
Boca Juniors 2 (2) (Salvio 23, Villa 61 pen)
Racing Club 0 (1)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

Semi-Finals - 1st Leg

Jan 6 - Buenos Aires
River Plate 0
Palmeiras 3 (Rony 27, Luiz Adriano 47, Vina 62)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Gonzalez (Uru)

Jan 6 - Buenos Aires
Boca Juniors 0
Santos 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)

Semi-Finals - 2nd Leg

Jan 13 - Sao Paulo
Palmeiras 0 (3)
River Plate 2 (2) (Rojas 29, Borre 44)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Ostojich (Uru)

Jan 13 - Sao Paulo
Santos 3 (3) (Pituca 16, Soteldo 49, Braga 51)
Boca Juniors 0 (0)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

Final

Jan 30 - Rio deJaneiro
Palmeiras 1 (Lopes 90+9)
Santos 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Loustau (Arg)

COPA SUDAMERICANA 2020

Round of 16 - 1st Leg

Nov 24 - Salvador
Bahia 1 (Gilberto 78 pen)
Union 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ortega (Per)

Nov 25 - Buenos Aires
Velez Sarsfield 2 (Almada 73, 84)
Deportivo Cali 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Garay (Chi)

Nov 25 - La Paz
Bolivar 2 (Riquelme 45, Haquin 86)
Lanus 1 (Belmonte 32)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** De Souza (Bra)

Nov 26 - Coquimbo
Coquimbo 0
Sport Huancayo 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vargas (Bol)

Nov 26 - Montevideo
Fenix 1 (Olivera 28 pen)
Independiente 4 (Gonzalez 3, Velasco 37, Romero 44, Martinez 51)
HT: 1-3. **Ref:** Benitez (Par)

Nov 26 - Montevideo
River Plate 1 (Piriz 45+3)
Universidad Catolica 2 (Zampedri 9, Aued 73 pen)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Mendez (Par)

Nov 27 - Buenos Aires
Defensa y Justicia 1 (Romero 79)
Vasco da Gama 1 (Cano 62)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Matonte (Uru)

Nov 27 - Barranquilla
Junior FC 2 (Cetre 44, Borja 84)
Union La Calera 1 (Rodriguez 60)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Tello (Arg)

Round of 16 - 2nd Leg

Dec 1 - Santa Fe
Union 0 (0)
Bahia 0 (1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ospina (Col)

Dec 2 - Palmira
Deportivo Cali 1 (1) (Palavecino 37)
Velez Sarsfield 5 (7) (Janson 20, 35, Abram 59, Tarragona 75, 88)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Aquino (Par)

Dec 2 - Buenos Aires
Lanus 6 (7) (Orozco 26, 54, Belmonte 40, 49, Lautaro Acosta 63, Orsini 86)
Bolivar 2 (4) (Riquelme 4, Alvaro Rey 73)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)

Dec 3 - Buenos Aires
Independiente 1 (5) (Romero 25)
Fenix 0 (1)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pereira Sampaio (Bra)

Dec 3 - Lima
Sport Huancayo 0 (0)
Coquimbo 2 (2) (Vallejos 1, Palacios 81)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Aragon (Ecu)

Dec 3 - La Calera
Union La Calera 2 (3) (Cordero 45, Leiva 59)
Junior FC 1 (3)* (Borja 1)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Arieu De Araujo (Bra)
**Junior FC win 4-2 on penalties*

Dec 4 - Rio deJaneiro
Vasco da Gama 0 (1)
Defensa y Justicia 1 (2) (Hachen 58)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Cunha (Uru)

Dec 4 - Santiago
Universidad Catolica 0 (2)*
River Plate 1 (2) (Bonifazi 51)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Herrera (Ven)
**Universidad Catolica win on away goals*

Quarter-Finals - 1st Leg

Dec 9 - Buenos Aires
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Lucero 90)
Universidad Catolica 2 (Zampedri 45+5, Puch 50)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Bruno Arieu de Araujo (Bra)

Dec 9 - Salvador
Bahia 2 (Gilberto 40 pen, Matheus Bahia 80)
Defensa y Justicia 3 (Romero 4, 26 pen, Fernandez 68)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Guerrero (Ecu)

Dec 10 - Barranquilla
Junior FC 1 (Borja 25 pen)
Coquimbo 2 (Abrigo 73, Palacios 88)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)

Dec 10 - Buenos Aires
Lanus 0
Independiente 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ostojich (Uru)

Quarter-Finals - 2nd Leg

Dec 16 - Santiago
Universidad Catolica 1 (3) (Aued 68 pen)
Velez Sarsfield 3 (4) (Tarragona 17 pen, Orellano 73, Lucero 90+4)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Gonzalez (Uru)

Dec 16 - Buenos Aires
Defensa y Justicia 1 (4) (Romero 87)
Bahia 0 (2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Aquino (Par)

Dec 17 - Coquimbo
Coquimbo 0 (2)*
Junior FC 1 (2) (Borja 7 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)
**Coquimbo win on away goals*

Dec 17 - Buenos Aires
Independiente 1 (1) (Roa 88)
Lanus 3 (3) (Belmonte 15, Sand 17, Orsini 44)
HT: 0-3. **Ref:** Raphael Claus (Bra)

Semi-Finals - 1st Leg

Jan 7 - Buenos Aires
Velez Sarsfield 0
Lanus 1 (Sand 39)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ospina (Col)

Jan 12 - Asuncion
Coquimbo 0
Defensa y Justicia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)

Semi-Finals - 2nd Leg

Jan 14 - Buenos Aires
Lanus 3 (4) (Belmonte 45+3, Orsini 60, Bernabei 88)
Velez Sarsfield 0 (0)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pereira Sampaio (Bra)

Jan 16 - Buenos Aires
Defensa y Justicia 4 (4) (Pizzini 11, Romero 20, 23, 44)
Coquimbo 2 (2) (Farfan 8, Palacios 62)
HT: 4-1. **Ref:** Rojas (Col)

Final

Jan 23 - Cordoba
Lanus 0
Defensa y Justicia 3 (Frias 34, Romero 62, Camacho 90+2)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)

ARGENTINA
Copa Maradona 2020

Group Stage

Zone 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atletico Tucuman	6	6	0	0	19	8	18
Arsenal	6	2	1	3	8	8	7
Union	6	2	1	3	9	11	7
Racing	6	1	0	5	2	11	3

Zone 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colon	6	4	1	1	11	3	13
Independiente	6	3	3	0	5	2	12
Central Cordoba	6	1	2	3	5	9	5
Defensa y Justicia	6	0	2	4	4	11	2

Zone 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
River Plate	6	5	0	1	11	5	15
Banfield	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
Rosario Central	6	2	1	3	7	10	7
Godoy Cruz	6	0	1	5	2	8	1

Zone 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca Juniors	6	3	1	2	7	4	10
Talleres	6	2	3	1	6	4	9
Newell's Old Boys	6	2	1	3	9	11	7
Lanus	6	2	1	3	8	11	7

Zone 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
San Lorenzo	6	3	3	0	8	1	12
Argentinos Juniors	6	3	1	2	6	4	10
Aldosivi	6	2	2	2	4	8	8
Estudiantes	6	0	2	4	0	5	2

Zone 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Huracan	6	3	2	1	8	6	11
Gimnasia y Esgrima	6	2	3	1	8	5	9
Velez Sarsfield	6	2	3	1	6	5	9
Patronato	6	0	2	4	1	7	2

Champion Phase

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca Juniors	5	2	3	0	10	6	9
River Plate	5	2	2	1	8	7	8
Argentinos Juniors	5	2	2	1	5	5	8
Arsenal	5	2	1	2	7	7	7
Independiente	5	2	0	3	10	9	6
Huracan	5	1	0	4	4	10	3

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Banfield	5	4	0	1	12	6	12
Talleres	5	3	2	0	10	6	11
Gimnasia y Esgrima	5	2	1	2	7	6	7
Colon	5	1	1	3	6	8	4
San Lorenzo	5	1	1	3	7	11	4
Atletico Tucuman	5	1	1	3	3	8	4

Champion Phase Final

Jan 17 - San Juan
Boca Juniors 1* (Cardona 63)
Banfield 1 (Lollo 90+5)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Tello (Arg)
**Boca Juniors win 5-3 on penalties*

Complementation Phase

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rosario Central	5	3	1	1	10	4	10
Lanus	5	2	2	1	6	5	8
Defensa y Justicia	5	2	2	1	10	10	8
Union	5	2	1	2	9	8	7
Aldosivi	5	1	1	3	7	10	4
Patronato	5	1	1	3	4	9	4

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Velez Sarsfield	5	4	0	1	10	6	12
Newell's Old Boys	5	3	0	2	8	5	9
Racing	5	2	2	1	13	7	8
Central Cordoba	5	1	2	2	6	9	5
Estudiantes	5	1	1	3	5	7	4
Godoy Cruz	5	1	1	3	5	13	4

Complementation Phase Final

Jan 16 - San Juan
Velez Sarsfield 3 (Centurion 8 pen, Almada 79 pen, Monzon 90+1)
Rosario Central 1 (Marinelli 25)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Loustau (Arg)

BOLIVIA
Primera Division 2020

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Always Ready (C)	26	16	3	7	59	29	51
The Strongest	26	16	2	8	65	35	50
Bolivar	26	15	4	7	60	29	49
Royal Pari	26	14	4	8	42	34	46
Jorge Wilstermann	26	12	6	8	36	28	42
Guabira	26	13	3	10	43	43	42
Nacional Potosi	26	11	6	9	34	35	39
Atletico Palmaflor	26	11	5	10	29	30	38
Blooming	26	12	2	12	38	43	38
Oriente Petrolero	26	9	3	14	37	51	30
Aurora	26	6	5	15	26	37	23
Real Potosi	26	6	5	15	35	59	23
Real Santa Cruz	26	6	5	15	36	62	23
San Jose	26	6	5	15	27	52	20

ECUADOR
Serie A 2020 (Aggregate Table)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LDU Quito	30	18	5	7	60	33	59
Barcelona (C)	30	16	10	4	46	21	58
Independiente del Valle	30	16	6	8	62	43	54
Universidad Catolica	30	14	9	7	48	28	51
Emelec	30	12	8	10	48	37	44
Guayaquil City	30	12	8	10	40	40	44
Macara	30	12	8	10	37	37	44
Aucas	30	11	9	10	59	55	42
Tecnico Universitario	30	11	9	10	28	27	42
Delfin	30	10	8	12	39	41	38
Mushuc Runa	30	8	7	15	33	45	31
Deportivo Cuenca	30	7	10	13	34	51	31
Orense	30	6	13	11	28	47	31
Olmedo	30	8	6	16	42	56	30
LDU Portoviejo (R)	30	8	6	16	39	59	30
El Nacional (R)	30	6	8	16	26	49	26

Final

Dec 23 - Guayaquil
Barcelona 1 (Alvez 50)
LDU Quito 1 (Julio 45+4)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Aragon (Ecu)

Dec 29 - Quito
LDU Quito 0 (1)
Barcelona 0 (1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Guerrero (Ecu)
**Barcelona win 3-1 on penalties*

PARAGUAY
Primera Division 2020 (Aggregate Table)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro Porteno	33	20	9	4	53	25	69
Olimpia (C)	33	18	8	7	74	36	62
Libertad	33	18	8	7	63	38	62
Guarani	33	16	11	6	41	23	59
Nacional	33	10	14	9	40	34	44
Guairena	33	9	14	10	40	43	41
12 de Octubre	33	11	8	14	38	51	41
River Plate	33	10	8	15	33	47	38
Sportivo Luqueno	33	9	9	15	35	51	36
Sol de America	33	8	11	14	42	54	35
San Lorenzo (R)	33	4	16	13	31	51	28
General Diaz (R)	33	3	8	22	34	71	17

Quarter-Finals

Dec 22 - Asuncion
Nacional 0
Sol de America 1 (Valdez 82)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Diaz De Vivar (Par)

Dec 22 - Asuncion
Cerro Porteno 1 (Gimenez 15)
Olimpia 1* (Recalde 10)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Aquino (Par)
**Olimpia win 4-1 on penalties*

Dec 23 - Asuncion
12 de Octubre 1 (Garcete 74)
Guairena 2 (Gonzalez 8, 24)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Mendez (Par)

Dec 23 - Luque
Libertad 1 (Cardozo 13)
Guarani 3 (Fernandez 49, Dominguez 80, Bobadilla 86)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Benitez (Par)

Semi-Finals

Dec 27 - Asuncion
Sol de America 2 (Cazal 83, Portillo 89)
Olimpia 4 (I. Torres 4, Recalde 55, Ortiz 67, D. Torres 82)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Benitez (Par)

Dec 27 - Asuncion
Guairena 0
Guarani 1 (Florentin 72)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Diaz De Vivar (Par)

Final

Dec 30 - Asuncion
Guarani 2 (Mana 36, Baez 39)
Olimpia 2* (Recalde 57, Silva 69 pen)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Benitez (Par)
**Olimpia win 5-4 on penalties*

PERU
Liga 1 2020 (Aggregate Table)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sporting Cristal (C)	28	16	8	4	58	32	56
Universitario	28	16	6	6	50	35	53
Universidad Cesar Vallejo	28	13	12	3	41	23	51
Ayacucho	28	13	8	7	42	26	47
Carlos A. Mannucci	28	12	9	7	41	29	45
Sport Huancayo	28	12	8	8	32	30	44
UTC	28	10	13	5	42	29	43
Melgar	28	11	8	9	41	34	41
Cienciano	28	12	5	11	39	34	41
Alianza Universidad	28	10	7	11	29	30	37
Universidad San Martin	28	10	7	11	32	37	37
Cusco	28	9	9	10	39	41	36
Binacional	28	10	6	12	35	42	36
Sport Boys	28	9	5	14	34	51	31
Deportivo Municipal	28	6	12	10	29	38	30
Cantolao	28	7	7	14	32	48	28
Carlos Stein	28	7	7	14	30	44	27
Alianza Lima (R)	28	6	8	14	28	36	26
Atletico Grau (R)	28	5	11	12	26	39	26
Dep Llacuabamba (R)	28	5	6	17	41	63	20

Final

Dec 16 - Lima
Universitario 1 (Quintero 66)
Sporting Cristal 2 (Chavez 26, Cazulo 52)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Alarcon (Per)

Dec 20 - Lima
Sporting Cristal 1 (3) (Alfageme 69 og)
Universitario 1 (2) (Quintero 50)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)

March 2021 *Vol. 61 No. 7*

GROUP EDITOR
Stephen Fishlock

ASSISTANT EDITORS
Jamie Evans & Jared Tinslay

STAFF WRITER
Sam Straw

DESIGN
Sean Phillips, atg-media.com

PICTURES
Pictures copyright: Getty Images

EDITORIAL
Kelsey Media, The Granary, Downs Court, Yalding Hill, Yalding, Maidstone, Kent, ME18 6AL

ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP
Talk Media Sales: David Lerpiniere
Tel: 01732 445325
Email: david.lerpiniere@talkmediasales.co.uk

CHIEF EXECUTIVE Steve Wright
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Phil Weeden
MANAGING DIRECTOR Kevin McCormick
PUBLISHER Steve Brown
SUBS MARKETING DIRECTOR Gill Lambert
SENIOR SUBS MARKETING MANAGERS
Nicholas McIntosh & Rochelle Gyer-Smith
PRINT PRODUCTION MANAGER
Georgina Harris
PRINT PRODUCTION CONTROLLERS
Kelly Orriss & Hayley Brown

DISTRIBUTION
Great Britain: Marketforce
Tel: 0330 390 6555
Northern Ireland and the Republic Of Ireland
Newspread Tel: +353 23 886 3850

PRINTING
William Gibbons & Sons Ltd

SUBSCRIPTIONS ORDER HOTLINE
+44 (0)1959 543 747
Lines open Mon-Fri, 8am-5.30pm

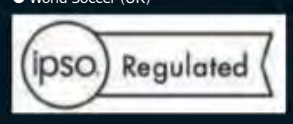
or visit shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSC

SUBSCRIPTIONS RATES
Full annual subscription rate (13 issues)
UK: £77.87, USA & EU: £91, RoW: £98.

CONTACT US
Editorial: wos.ed@kelsey.co.uk
UK subscription & back issue orderline:
01959 543 747
Overseas subscription orderline:
0044 (0) 1959 543 747
Toll free USA subscription orderline:
1-888-777-0275
Customer service website:
help.kelsey.co.uk/support/home
Customer service & subscription postal address:
World Soccer Customer Service Team
Kelsey Publishing Ltd, The Granary,
Downs Court, Yalding Hill, Yalding,
Maidstone, Kent, ME18 6AL

WorldSoccer is a member of

● A Bola (Portugal) ● De Telegraaf (Netherlands)
● ElfVoetbal (Netherlands) ● Fanatik (Turkey)
● Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany)
● La Gazzetta dello Sport (Italy)
● Kicker (Germany) ● Marca (Spain)
● Nemzeti Sport (Hungary) ● Sport-Express (Russia)
● Sport/Foot (Belgium) ● TIPS Bladet (Denmark)
● World Soccer (UK)



Maracana...Inside the stadium during the 2014 World Cup Final

MARACANA STADIUM

Location: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Team: Flamengo and Fluminense
Built: 1950
Capacity: 78,838

Originally built for the 1950 World Cup, one of the world's most iconic stadiums was back in the spotlight at the end of January as it hosted the all-Brazilian 2020 Copa Libertadores final between Palmeiras and Santos.

Situated in the middle-class neighbourhood of Maracana, Rio, the largest stadium in Brazil is now officially named Estadio Jornalista Mario Filho in honour of one of the country's pioneers of sports journalism. Filho played a key role in campaigning for the stadium's construction ahead of hosting the first post-war World Cup. At the time it was the world's largest stadium, with 199,854 supporters cramming in to watch Brazil lose 2-1 to Uruguay in the final.

From 2010 to 2013, the stadium was renovated at a cost of over $500m in preparation for the 2014 World Cup, as well as the 2016 Olympics and Paralympics.

In addition to hosting the national team, the Maracana is also home to Flamengo and Fluminense, while Botafogo and Vasco da Gama have made use of the arena too.

Stunning... an aerial view of the stadium

Champions...Germany celebrate winning the 2014 World Cup

Iconic...an aerial view of the Christ The Redeemer statue and the stadium

GREATEST GAMES

1950 July 16 Uruguay 2-1 Brazil

The *"Maracanazo"* (Agony of Maracana) left a deep and lasting wound on Brazilian football that has arguably never healed. The hosts needed only to avoid defeat to be crowned world champions, but lost 2-1 to goals from Juan Alberto Schiaffino and Alcides Ghiggia. The defeat led to a period of national mourning in Brazil, with goalkeeper Moacir Barbosa cast as a villain for the next 50 years.

2014 July 13 Germany 1-0 Argentina (AET)

Germany became the first European country to win a World Cup in South America, as an extra-time strike from Mario Gotze saw them defeat Argentina in the 2014 final. It was Germany's first World Cup triumph since they beat the same opponents in Rome 24 years earlier.

2016 August 20 Brazil 1 (P) 1-1 Germany

Two years after Brazil were humiliated 7-1 by Germany at the 2014 World Cup, they got their revenge by beating them 5-4 on penalties at the Maracana to win their first men's Olympic football gold medal. The match ended 1-1 after extra-time, as Neymar's 25-yard free-kick was cancelled out by Max Meyer's strike.

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE MARCH 19

WorldSoccer®

Global football intelligence

SERIOUS OPINION
Hard-hitting opinions from the game's most respected writers.

EXPERT ANALYSIS
Football's burning issues analysed by expert figures in the game.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS
Face to face with football's biggest names.

COMPETITION GUIDES
Essential previews of football's biggest tournaments.

TALENT SCOUT
Spotlight on the talented youngsters tipped for the top.

EYEWITNESS REPORTS
News and features from our global network of correspondents.

Subscribe to get your first 3 issues of World Soccer for just £5 saving 72% on the cover price (shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSC221)

facebook.com/WorldSoccerMagazine

@worldsoccermag

www.worldsoccer.com

1960 – 2016
EURO SUMMITS
THE STORY OF THE UEFA EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP
All Crazee Now
ENGLISH FOOTBALL AND FOOTBALLERS IN THE 1970s
CELTIC MINUTE BY MINUTE
Covering More Than 500 Goals, Penalties, Red Cards and Other Intriguing Facts
Black & White Knight
How Sir Bobby Robson made Newcastle United again
Foreword by George Caulkin
STUART HORSFIELD
Never Give Up
The Graham Buster Tutt Story
ERIK SAMUELSON
How Wimbledon Fans Brought Their Club Back Home
All Together Now
BOB BOND
HOME OF ENGLISH FOOTBALL
100 Years of Wembley Stadium in cartoons and caricatures
TEARS AT LA BOMBONERA
FOOTBALL • TRAVEL • CULTURE • HISTORY • GROUNDHOPPING
STORIES FROM A SIX-YEAR SOJOURN IN SOUTH AMERICA
CHRISTOPHER HYLLAND
FOREWORD BY TIM VICKERY
An Ode to Four Four Two
Football's Simplest and Finest Formation
John McNicoll
BAD LIFE
PAUL WELLER
INGLORY
THE GREATEST ESCAPE
The Craziest Season in West Ham United's History
DANIEL HURLEY
EVEN MORE TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2021
pitch
www.pitchpublishing.co.uk
THE ONLY PLACE FOR US
AN A-Z HISTORY OF ELLAND ROAD
HOME OF LEEDS UNITED
JON HOWE
FOREWORD BY DAVID BATTY
LONDON'S FIELDS
Marcelo BIELSA
WHOSE GAME IS IT ANYWAY?
Football, Life, Love & Loss
MICHAEL CALVIN
365
FIERCE GENIUS
FATHER SON
Gary Thacker
BEAUTIFUL BRIDESMAIDS
Dressed in Oranje
The Unfulfilled Glory of Dutch Football
STEVE BRUCE
ARRIVAL
How Scotland's Women Took Their Place on the World Stage and Inspired a Generation
A Straggling Life
ANDREW WATSON
The Story of the World's First Black International Footballer
LLEW WALKER
The Little FELLA
How Middlesbrough fell in love wi
Juninho
DAVID BROO
TIM QUELCH
AN END OF INNOCENCE
The Watershed Season of 1959/60
Love of the Game
Ricky HILL
The Man Who Brought The Rooney Rule to the UK
FOREWORD BY IAN WRIGHT
DAVID ROBERTSON
THE QUIET MAN ROARS
The DAVID ROBERTSON Story
THE HIBS ARE HERE!
ORIGIN STORIES
THE PIONEERS WHO TOOK FOOTBALL TO THE WORLD
CHRIS LEE
THE MIRACL
LUKE WILLIAMS
1999 WATCH THE THRONE
THE TACTICS BEHIND THE PREMIER LEAGUE'S EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS
2019
NEIL PALMER
The GERRY GOW Story
He's Here, He's There...
70 YEARS OF SPURS
SILVER LINING
Bobby Robson's England
tom whitworth
when the seagulls follow the trawler
football in the 90s
TALES FROM THE TOUCHLINE
TWINNED WITH REYKJAVÍK
STOKE CITY
THE SUNSHINE Kid
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF